

Shipmates
in
Sunshine

Frankfort Moore



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SHIPMATES IN SUNSHINE.



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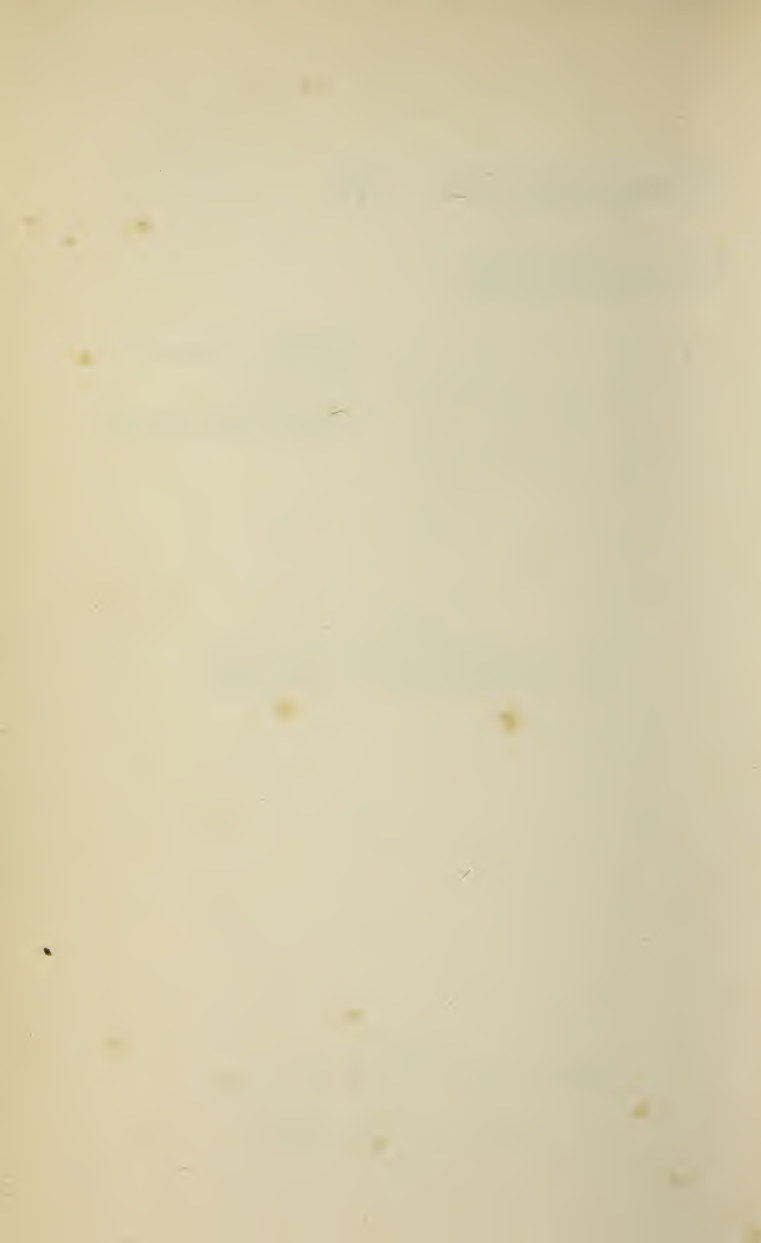
Shipmates in Sunshine

THEIR ROMANCE
ON THE
CARIBBEAN CRUISE

BY
F. FRANKFORT MOORE

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SHIPMATES IN SUNSHINE.

CHAPTER I.

“ A small black handbag—not very small—ordinary size. It must be somewhere.”

“ Who did you give it to, sir ?” asked the Steward.

“ A porter or somebody; I took it for granted that he belonged to the Company.”

“ To the ship’s company, sir ?”

“ The Company—the Company—the Railway Company. Hang it all ! is there no one looking after the passengers’ luggage ? Such mismanagement ! It had a patch on the bottom—the left hand corner as you unlock it, and one of the brass studs where you clasp it was missing.”

“ Was it labelled, sir ?”

“ No, it wasn’t labelled, but there was a place for a label—a leather label holder. I should know it in a minute. Where’s the Captain ? To think that I should have travelled all over England and once to Ireland too—the very heart of Ireland—with that bag, and it never got lost until the present moment ! The man offered to carry it aboard for me. I had my rug on my

arm and I didn't want my deck chair to be smashed to atoms—I know what these steamers are—I've been to Ireland, and I was at the Naval Review."

"I say, Steward, am I to have a cabin to myself? They promised me one at the office."

"What number, sir?"

"14 B."

"Very sorry, sir, Purser was compelled to put someone else in your second bunk."

"Oh, confound it! Is it a man or a woman?"

"Only another gentleman, sir."

"Oh, well, that's not so bad as it might be. Does he snore?"

"Can't say, sir, he's a stranger to me."

"If he snores I'll throw him into the scuppers—be sure you tell him that."

"Yessir."

"Are you the Captain, please?"

"No, Miss, I'm the Steward."

There was a note of indignation in the disclaimer: the Steward had no mind to be taken for so commonplace an official as the Captain. How would the third officer like to be taken for the Doctor?

"Perhaps you will do as well. I want to know if I can have some of the small-sized Spratt's dog biscuits—not for myself; but I saw a stray cat—I really think it might have been a half Persian—I fancy that the small size would be best."

"I say, Steward, can we choose any places that we please in the saloon? The fact is that my wife can't endure the sight of a nigger. If I had known that there were nigger waiters aboard this steamer I shouldn't have come. Could you manage to keep them in another part of the ship while the meals are going on? It might be serious—it might indeed; she is in a very

weak state of health—that's why we are going on this voyage."

"Is the Steward there? Oh, are you the Steward? Then perhaps you can tell me what's the name of this steamer that we're aboard of and where we're bound for? It's not idle curiosity on my part that makes me ask you, only if it's the *Avon* bound for the West Indies, it is twenty minutes past its advertised time for sailing. Now, I've an appointment at Guadaloupe and if I miss it, I'll hold the company responsible, so you just—"

"Hang it all, Steward, what do you mean by allowing my stable companion to pile up our cabin with his things? Three portmanteaux, a cabin trunk, a suit case, a hold-all, a lunch basket and a net sack bursting with novels—the worst trash! I don't want to make a row, so you'd best come along and fix up things before I hoof him and his blessed—"

"Mister—Steward—can my wife have a cup of tea and a biscuit before lunch? It's the only thing she fancies and—"

"Where's the Steward? How is it that he's never where he's wanted? What sort of management—oh, are you the Steward?"

"Yessir."

"Then maybe you can oblige me with a halfpenny stamp."

I thought it well at this point to get on deck. I had been standing in the companion of the Royal Mail Steamer *Avon* since the arrival of the special train from Waterloo a quarter of an hour before, being anxious to find out if the Steward of an ocean-going steamer continues to be baited by newly arrived passengers as freely as he used to be in the old days of my seafaring. I thought that I had heard enough evidence to go on with. Only one train-load of passengers had come

aboard the *Avon*, and of these no inconsiderable portion were wrestling with deck chairs. They would soon be free to put their enquiries to the Steward and keep him from having many moments of graceful leisure until the second train arrived. After that I felt sure that he would be constantly employed. In every steamer on which I have yet sailed the Steward is looked on by the passengers as is the Secretary of a club by the members—as are the correspondence columns of the country newspaper by “Constant Subscriber,” “Ratepayer,” and “Pro Bono Publico”—as was the safety valve of an old-fashioned engine by the old-fashioned engineer.

But the Steward is no more sensitive than a policeman, a megaphone, or the Official Receiver. You may unburden yourself of every grievance before him without causing him to think the better of you—or the worse. And he looks so very human all the time that people are telling him of their wrongs, though in reality they might as well go to a grain elevator. He is possibly the most useful of the ship's company, and it is said that he makes it pay to be civil to all the aggrieved, and to change foreign money into English at the rate of thirty francs to the sovereign.

The month was January and the S.S. *Avon* was alongside the dock breast-work at Southampton at the point of casting off for the West Indies. The day which we had left behind us at Waterloo was such an one as the late Monsieur Zola would have described with feeling and—if he had gone far enough—accuracy. The morning had been breathing heavily about Waterloo station like a dozing debauchee after a drink-sodden night. Its squalor, as it hung reeking over the Thames, breathing visibly, malodorously, perspiringly, was appalling. The morning had stumbled out of the gutter into the stable and then had crawled into

Waterloo station to see us off. We turned aside from its moist and musty goodbye ; but still we felt its heavy-hanging breath, reeking of a mixture of the stable and the kennel.

And then suddenly through the reek of this Zolaesque atmosphere there flashed before my eyes the white label of a trunk inscribed " Jamaica."

In an instant I had passed from Zola to Pierre Loti. The mist vanished and the mire was banished. There came before me a vision of an ocean island bathed in balm—that was the word which the vision whispered to me—balm, with its gracious rhymes of " palm " and " calm," clinging about my brain as faint echoes of something musical hover about the mixed marbles of the Baptistery at Pisa. I had a whiff of a coral lagoon—the dawn was pearling over it, with the floss of a lazy-breaking wave in the distance.

.

And then a truck-load of luggage labelled " Port of Spain " pulled up beside me—a couple of wooden boxes with " Dominica " painted on their sides were flung contemptuously at my feet by a porter, and another came up with my own portmanteau and deck chair transfigured by a halo inscribed " Barbados." I did not need anything more to make me forget the dreariness of that dripping morning. The magic of the names of these places was enough to banish everything that lacked the elements of romance from my mind. A few months before I was waiting at an insignificant junction in the south of Ireland, when a long line of carriages ran up at the platform and the porters opened the doors shouting,

" Change here for Ameriky—change here for Ameriky !"

I learnt that the train was full of emigrants bound for

Queenstown, where they were to embark for New York ; but most of them knew nothing beyond the fact that they wanted to go to America ; so the porters were tactful enough to refrain from introducing a complication of issues.

I was in hopes that when our special should come to the platform the guard would shout,

“ Embark here for the Spanish Main ! ”

That was my objective—the Spanish Main. We were exchanging the gloom of a London January fog for the glory of a tropical archipelago—the sullen sodden London street for the glow of a garden of sunshine.

And now I was aboard the S.S. *Avon* and had already put a question or two to the Steward and had played the eavesdropper while my fellow-passengers had elbowed themselves forward to follow up my questions.

And if my companions in the companion proved to be part and parcel of those with whom I had voyaged East and West and North and South in the old days, my shipmates whom I found on the upper deck differed in no respect from any whom I remembered on decks that have long ago been “ scrapped.” I could not help thinking too that the steamer on which I had now embarked was remarkably like one on which I had made a trip to the Cape ; I really felt equal to finding my way without a guide to any part of the ship. The best ghost story in existence is that of the lady who was accustomed to have a curious dream of wandering through a house that was strange to her in her waking moments. Some time afterwards she went down to stay in a part of England where she had never been before, and, when there, was taken to pay a visit to a house that had the reputation of being haunted. At once she recognized the house of her frequent dream, and was able to direct her husband to certain rooms and describe their contents.

A day or two later she met the lady whose house it was, and this one started violently on seeing her visitor. The conversation, never very fluent, turned upon the household ghost.

"Is it a man or a woman ghost?" enquired the lady.

"A woman," replied the other gravely.

"I did not see her during the three nights I slept there," said the first.

"No, no, you would not see her, you—you would not."

"Why should not I, as well as any one else, see her?"

"You could not, because you are She," was the tremulous answer.

Now, I felt in regard to this ship as the ghost lady must have felt on entering the house of her dream: I had a feeling that I was once again a passenger on the old Union-Castle liner, *Boer*, and I felt quite at home on the deck of this *Avon*, and thought it a happy coincidence that I should, after the lapse of a good many years, find myself a passenger on the sister ship to the *Boer*. I strolled up to the bridge and passing a deck house, I saw upon the bell the name *Boer* engraved in bold letters.

What a start I got! How in heaven's name had I been idiot enough to embark on the Cape liner *Boer* when I had booked my passage to the West Indies by the Royal Mail *Avon*? I made a dive for the hand-rail, hoping that I might still be in time to get my luggage transhipped, when my eyes lighted on a life-buoy painted with the name *Avon*. A mulatto quartermaster passed me and on his cap was the name *Avon* in letters of pure gold. At that moment I felt more like the ghost lady than ever. I was having my dream of haunting a ship's deck, and I could hardly distinguish it from an incipient nightmare.

"Would you mind letting me know what is the name of this steamer?" I asked of a gentleman who had just come upon the bridge.

He looked at me as if—well, as I expected he would look.

"No, I haven't lunched yet," I said in reply to the words that he caught in his teeth as they were coming naturally from him. "No, but having seen the name *Boer* on a bell, and recognizing some things aboard the vessel which were also aboard the *Boer*—but you see *Avon* on the life-buoy and——"

The gentleman laughed.

"You are not to blame; your eyes did not deceive you," said he. "The fact is that this steamer was the old *Boer*, and when she got too much out of date for the Union-Castle the Royal Mail bought her and called her the *Avon*. What is obsolete on the Union-Castle is a striking innovation on the Royal Mail."

"Oh. But the *Boer*——"

"Yes, she's a bit venerable. But so is the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company, and the officers are entitled by their charter to wear side arms. When a steamer has grown old in crime under another house flag, she continues her career under an alias in the service of the Royal Mail. Good old *Boer*, she's as criminal as ever; but she may roll across the Atlantic once or twice still before being made amenable to justice. She'll scrap well."

"She was a bit of a roller in the old days," said I.

"She may have got steadier in her old age," said he.

I felt doubtful on this point. I went below wondering if it was because the Royal Mail is the oldest Steam Packet company in the world, that it is considered *de rigueur* to have a fleet of the oldest steamers afloat. Personally my heart leaps up when I behold a gallant

ship that has survived the storms of a hundred years and the policy of scuttle which unscrupulous owners maintained in the ante-Plimsollian days ; but like Bob Acres' ancestors, they are the last sort that I should wish to have a visiting acquaintance with. I prefer sailing in something less venerable but of more velocity. These ten-knot greyhounds do not appeal to me. They are lacking in spirit. They are too full of groanings and too greatly afflicted by the ague-shakes to be pleasant on a voyage of any duration. An old steamer painted and varnished and made to look jauntily modern is as pitiable a companion as an old beau who fondly fancies that the five hairs which he pastes carefully across his poll conceal his baldness, and that a wispy moustache with the ends waxed brings back the freshness of youth.

But the *Boer*, alias *Avon*, may still, I think, not deserve to be as black as she is painted. Beneath that too fresh exterior there may be a comfortable cabin or two, just as we used to be told in the ancient Adelphi dramas that beneath the moleskin waistcoat of the honest Yorkshireman a true heart may beat ; only the honest Yorkshireman's waistcoat was not just as fresh as paint.

"Are you a passenger, sir ?" I was asked by a middle-aged gentleman in the smoking-room, whither I retired out of a slant of sudden rain.

I admitted that I had a tourist's ticket, and he gave me to understand that he approved of the step which I proposed taking.

"You are right—quite right," he said with a wave of the hand. "I've just been telling the gentlemen here"—he gave a wave in the direction of half-a-dozen loiterers—"of the advantages of travel. I repeat that it expands the mind—there's nothing expands the

mind like travel. You'll always know a man that has travelled. There's something in the way he talks—a kind of confidence——”

“ You are coming the round of the islands ?” I asked.

“ No, not this time, sir. I'm a commercial, and I find it difficult to get away for more than a fortnight now and then, but I always spend that fortnight knocking about—I've been as far north as Edinburgh in my time ; that shows you that I've always been a believer in travelling. I tell you that it—it expands the mind. Look at me, for example ; I'm not going to the West Indies, but—just think of it—yesterday I was at Portsmouth, here I am to-day at Southampton, and heaven only knows where I may be to-morrow—maybe, Bournemouth !”

He made this revelation to us with bated breath, and then looked round from man to man to see what effect it had upon us.

When we were all silent, he seemed thoroughly satisfied. There was a gleam of triumph in his eyes—he had silenced us. We had no word to say to the detriment of travel as an expander of the mind.

CHAPTER II.

It would, of course, be ridiculous to expect that the romance of the voyage will develop itself before the eyes of the recorder until the steamer is out of soundings ; but it is as well to be on the *qui vive*. Already I have seen a young woman whose eyes suggest great possibilities. They seem to me to be most companionable eyes—not too deep to make a man feel hopeless when they rest upon him—not so full of spirituality as to be devoid of spirit—not so intellectual as to be devoid of intelligence. She is with an elderly man : he might either be her father or her husband, I thought when we sat down to lunch. I rather hoped that he might be the latter. The recorder of romance grows very hopeful when a young woman with companionable eyes and a husband whom strangers sometimes take for her father “ swims into his ken.” But before lunch is over I perceive from the attention which he bestows upon her that he is her father. He does not treat her with that indifference which is the result of possession with propinquity. But I am not without hopes of her. She may give that father of hers trouble yet. A father is a stone that is thrown into the stream of true love to prevent its running too smooth.

But she may not after all set the pattern for the romance of the voyage. The Fates do not always work

with silken threads. When, having suspended the operation of spinning out the various fibres that come under their hands, they set about weaving one of their crazy quilts, they work after the manner of lunatics (we think)—snatching up skeins at hap-hazard—one of silk at the right hand, one of cotton at the left, twisting them together for the warp in their loom, and then making a mad woof of worsted it may be—perhaps jute—one fibre will serve as well as another. The instant that the shuttles are filled they set their loom in motion, mixing up human lives incongruously, irregularly, but irresistibly, without referring to any design—without caring in the least what happens so long as something comes out at the other end of the loom. Pattern is no object, harmony of colouring is not studied by the weavers; equality of surface, delicacy of finish, perfection of detail are totally neglected. The threads are woven together by the shooting shuttle and they may writhe and strain and become attenuated in the process—it matters nothing to the weavers. They have the shears handy and the knots are simply dealt with—the Fates do not bother unloosing knots, but they do a deal of snipping in the course of their weaving. The result of their unprincipled labour is ludicrous, but it serves. It must serve. It is a gaol quilt: a thing to grumble at—to swear at, but to be endured all the same. Sometimes it becomes endurable—sometimes it seems even luxurious. Heavens! When one examines the materials of which it is made and knows of the rudimentary character of the machine which turned it out, one ceases to wonder that the thing is so foolish: the wonder is that it serves its purpose so well.

Its purpose?

But that is where the jest comes in; for the Fates weave for the fun of the thing: they do not work with

a purpose. That is how it comes that a recorder is never without hope. He knows that the only essential to the weaving of that craziest of crazy quilts, romance, is incongruity. He knows that no woman that ever lived is commonplace, so he hopes and is not afraid.

After all it may be that that girl with the prominent teeth and the good-humoured smile will prove the spoilt darling of the Fates and cause the ship to be set on fire by some inflammatory youth who aims at rescuing her and her alone out of all the ship's company. Who can tell ?

At any rate here is plenty of material for the weaving. The saloon is quite crowded at lunch—hearing the meal called lunch instead of tiffin, makes me feel that we are on the way to the West, not the East—and there is incongruity enough to satisfy the most jocular Fate. People who are saying goodbye to friends are partaking of lunch with them, so that it is impossible to say who are the passengers and who will go ashore when the steamer casts off her moorings. But I rather hope that if it is ordained that either the young woman with the companionable eyes or her father must go ashore, it will be the father who will do so.

But I think that when the time comes to choose a place at a table I will choose one at another table than that at which this particular young woman sits.

And I certainly will not choose one at the table which may be selected by a man whom I have just encountered and who assures me that he remembers me years ago. I came upon him in the smoking-room and found that he had theories on the making of cocktails. He offered to place his experience at my disposal, and altogether showed himself to be so friendly that I knew he could not have been an old friend. An old friend never tries to show you that he is an old friend. He simply is one.

And then the bell rang for the ship to be cleared, and the usual business of saying goodbye began. There was nothing affecting about any of the partings at the steamer's rail. They all suggested a certain polite restraint. No one associates danger with the deep nowadays. I believe that it has been proved by statistics that if one devotes one life to making the passage of the Atlantic one will live to the age of one hundred and eighty-two; only one must never go ashore. The moment that one goes ashore the risk begins.

There was really no farewell spoken, only *au revoir*. A young woman close to where I was standing was assuring her sister that she would be back in time for Mrs. Griffen's dance in March, and a youth who seemed to be on terms of expectant friendship with the sister, asked her to keep the first polka for him, the second extra and the last valse but three.

The hawsers were cast off without emotion. I could see in many faces on shore a certain expression of relief when the engine-room bell began to tinkle its "Stand by." Several times I had noticed during the previous two hours a general expression on every countenance that said as plainly as possible—

"Is the thing never going to clear off?"

As a matter of fact I heard this question asked both afloat and ashore, and when at last the clearing off took place there was plenty of smiling.

Very different indeed was this scene of chastened farewell from one which I had witnessed in the south of Ireland the month before. I had heard the sound of that extravagance of alternate lamentation and jubilation, which seems to be the essence of the Irish temperament, in the neighbourhood of one of those hideous zinc-roofed, comfortable houses which have

during the past ten years taken the place of the picturesque squalid cabins.

"What's going on there—a wake?" I asked the groom.

"'Tis a *live wake*, sir, that they're having," he replied with an unstified sigh, that told me that 'twas himself was longing to join the jubilant mourners.

"A live wake?" said I; for I had never heard the expression before.

"A live wake, sir. 'Tis Timmy O'Ryan that's immigrating from here to Ameriky, and as his widdy mother is nigh upon eighty 'tis the same as burying him that it is to her and the rest of the family, so they're having times of it till the morning."

"Oh, that's a live wake?" said I, and as the dog-cart went round the curve of the black road I could hear the fitful wail of this melancholy festivity when anyone opened the door of the cottage for a second or two. The sound burst forth as do the flames of a locomotive furnace when the stoker opens the door to stoke.

I chanced to be at the railway station the next day when the O'Ryan was sloping slowly to the West—a stripling of forty-five or thereabouts. There were a score or so of his friends of both sexes seeing him off, and it seemed to be etiquette to pay no attention whatever to the hero of the occasion so long as the train was not in sight. The people chatted and joked and were silent among themselves all this time, and Mr. O'Ryan was treated with absolute indifference. His isolation was chilling. But the moment that the train appeared—the visible shape of an awful, irresistible Destiny—there was a murmur, and the murmur broadened into a wail. The women threw themselves upon the man's shoulders with floods of tears and all the variations of grief articulate, and the men crushed in upon him with out-

stretched hands and continuous cries of "Good luck to ye, Timmy!" "God save ye, Timmy!" "Safe over, Tim, my man!"

They were all clinging to him, and he had to fight his way through them to get at his box, when the guard of the train—Chorus of the wrought-iron Monster of Destiny—called out his callous formula :

"Queenstown train : all take your seats."

It needed the efforts of all the staff of the station to disentangle Timothy O'Ryan from his friends and bundle him with his bundles into a carriage. And when their official duties were discharged the station staff became ordinary human beings again, and all had to say farewell to the man on their own account.

The crescendo of the babel of goodbyes was reached when the guard, with the air of a noble Roman father giving the order for the decapitation of his best friend for the good of Rome, blew his whistle. A hundred hands were stretched forth to the window which Mr. O'Ryan fully occupied ; hats were waved—handkerchiefs—mufflers—blackthorns—pipes and one empty bottle. The crowd ran alongside the train as it steamed out of the station—yelling and weeping and praying and hurling good wishes after the man.

The three porters became for the moment like the brave Horatius and his companions—more Roman fathers—holding back the surging crowd, and then they jumped upon the footboard and shook the man by the hand as he leant with half his body out of the window.

That was something like a parting. But alongside the dock at Southampton there was scarcely a handkerchief seen—I believe that I did see one ; it was being waved, not used to conceal emotion.

Everyone seemed glad that even this unemotional formality was over. No one glanced back at the dock-

side. We were free to look after our own comforts and to admire the winter view of the Solent.

Now that a separation had been made between the passengers and their friends who had come to see them off, I could give undivided attention to my *materiel*. But of all the humiliating habits to acquire that of speculating upon one's fellow creatures is the most egregious if it is also the most fascinating. My experience has long ago taught me that it is the utterest folly making out among the people whom one meets, a cast for any particular romance that one may invent. And yet I can never resist the temptation of doing so, and on the most conventional lines. The humiliations to which I am subjected by remorseless actuality are not in the least discouraging. When I have made up my mind that that exquisite girl who sits shyly in a corner of a railway carriage, has acquired her expression of habitual sadness owing to the cruelty of her father who wants her to marry a rich outside broker in order to save his own tottering fortunes—she, I feel, is too *spirituelle* even for a member of the Stock Exchange—I am quite ready to make her cause my own, and do my best to bring that hardened old man who is ready to sell his own flesh and blood, to see the evil of his ways. But when the *spirituelle* girl leans pathetically out of the window at the next station and calls to the newsboy to bring her “all the winners,” and when I hear her explain to the cruel elderly man beside her, how the scratching of *Porcupine* at the eleventh hour was a stable dodge in order to put an extra six pounds upon *Orfull* for the Oaks, I am led to feel that this particular young lady is after all not too bright or good to be the wife of a company promoter.

When I discover that the dashing young cavalry officer of my momentary romance, who captures the

heart of my heroine the moment they meet, is the chucker-out at a restaurant in Piccadilly Circus, and that the limping, middle-aged, pasty-faced city clerk was a short time ago the co-respondent in what the newspapers term "A Society Scandal," I begin to feel that I know nothing of the elementary principles of natural selection.

And yet, before the steamer is out of the Solent, my idiotic imagination, working in as conventional lines as were ever adopted by the novelist of the past, has got together a complete cast for certain dramas to be enacted before we reach Barbados.

How can I help it ?

There is that young soldier—he got his brevet majority on the field when he swooped down with a hundred mounted men upon three times their number of Boers, taking them by surprise and making prisoners of all who survived the onslaught—he is trying the long-voyage remedy for the wound that incapacitated him.

What a figure for the romance of an hour is there ? I already see that tall girl who has brought her maid with her, looking at him with interested eyes. Her name, I find, is Miss Croysdale—unless she bought her deck-chair second-hand and did not take the trouble to paint over the name of the previous owner. How could she help being attracted by this brave young fellow, who has the additional qualification of not being able to walk without the aid of a stick.

Now will she be true to the man whom she loves, or will she yield her heart to the keeping of Major Wingfield with the stick ? That is the question which perturbs me.

And what about that good-humoured looking girl who is dressed with such comfortable becomingness,

and curls herself up in her sensible deck-chair—she takes a large size in deck-chairs, I notice? She is not ashamed of her attempt to go asleep with her furs well tucked in about her throat, and she has no reason to be ashamed of the shape of her foot, which is unconsciously displayed (with a generous amount of ankle) on the support of her chair. She is a most attractive young woman—not so young as to call for remark, but not too old to be sensible. Her father's name is Crofton, so I suppose that she is Miss Crofton. She is one of those women who, you know the first moment you see them, are not married. And then one is face to face with the problem—

“Why is she not married?”

To work out that question from every standpoint would occupy anyone possessing an average share of imagination more than the time it takes to make the round of the islands.

I feel sure that she has had her option more than once. When a man sees that a young woman knows how to make herself comfortable, he is pretty sure that she will make him comfortable, and he is not wrong. But why did she refuse her offers? Was it because she was so comfortable single? Alas! the aspiration of every woman is to make others comfortable—that is her business in life.

This Miss Crofton interests me greatly; and this is perhaps why I do not see quite clearly the rôle which she is to play in the romance—any of the romances of the voyage.

But how can that tall slender girl with the innocent eyes and the long dark lashes be kept out of all the romance that is going? Where have I seen her before? It takes me some time to recall her; but at last I have found her. She is the girl of a poem which I read in

my boyhood and realized in my manhood. She is the "maiden living all above" of the stanza—

" Had I the grace to win the grace
Of maiden living all above,
My soul would trample down the base,
That she might have a man to love."

There is the girl—sweet and gentle and interested in everything. Of all deeds that are done in this world of travail and passion, she knows nothing—nothing of the strange joy of hate—nothing of the stranger woe of love. For girls like this one men die. With a girl like this one a man lives.

Her name is Ethel Hope—so much I found out early. She is going out in charge of an elderly lady who has an inoffensive husband. But I have noticed that a third of the elderly series—a gentleman named Sowerby (with a visage to correspond) looks upon himself as a sort of understudy in the duties which they have undertaken. When Mrs. Krux—the *chaperon* in chief—leaves her chair for a moment, Mr. Sowerby sits in it. The same thing happens when Mr. Krux makes a move; so that Miss Hope is evermore sandwiched by her protectors. There never was so embarrassing a policy of protection. I fancy that before long the girl may become an ardent Free Trader.

I see two or three glances being cast at her and her *entourage*, and I know that enquiries have already been made as to her destination—is she making the round of the islands or merely going out to some relations in Jamaica or Trinidad?

Romance is in the air.

But there are plenty of "supers" in whatever drama or comedy or farce may be played on the boards of the *Avon*, with the Atlantic Ocean as a stage cloth and the

blue sky of the tropics as the act-drop. I came upon some of the "citizens," etc., of the playbill, when I backed into the cushioned deck-house termed in the plans of the steamer the "drawing-room," to avoid a shower of rain. They looked matronly enough but not too matronly, and I felt sure that they had been exchanging views regarding each other's furs, for they were now exchanging confidences on the subject of husbands. The sequence will be apparent to anyone who has given some attention to the question of the civilizing of woman.

Woman talks nowadays precisely as she did at a period which ignorant *savants* term prehistoric—as if men and women did not begin to make history the moment that they came down from their trees and began to live in caves, just as they do to-day. In those old times the most important topic outside the family cave was (as it is now) the hunting. This topic divided itself naturally into two departments—(1) The flesh for eating, (2) The fur for wearing. When these points were threshed out the women talked about the hunters.

I was sure that Mrs. Heber and Mrs. Pritchard—the two matrons who were in the drawing-room—had talked first of their cooks, then of their furs, for they had now reached the third stage.

There is scarcely any conversation worth listening to except that which is conducted in a whisper; just as there are scarcely any stories worth the telling except those which should never be told. But it was plain that the matrons of the *Avon* meant their exchange of confidences to be anything but confidential. Their wisdom was not meant to pass from one mouth to one ear only. Their wisdom was experience. They had suffered that all who might hear their words should be wise.

"Oh, no matter what dreams we may once have had, marriage opens our eyes," came the *prima vox*, with the *obligato* of a sigh of complete satisfaction.

"Ah, yes, yes—the feet of clay—the feet of clay!" sighed *vox secunda*.

"That is it—the feet of clay. We poor girls place them on a pedestal, but it does not last—we soon find out that our idols have feet of clay," said *prima vox*; and then Mrs. Heber pretended that she had just become aware of my proximity. She smiled—I had met her several times on dry land and we had already got the rough edge off our greetings aboard the *Avon*—and nodded at me, saying—

"We have been talking about you."

"I feel flattered."

"Oh, you needn't. Not about you personally—only you among the rest."

"I deny the rest. To every man the world of men is made up of himself and the rest. He insists on the partition."

"Well, you may keep yourself to yourself; but still you men are all made on the same model."

"To deny it would be to pronounce oneself an atheist, Mrs. Heber. What does your Bible say about man and his model—'In the image of God'—?"

"You must not mock. Think that there is only a thin plank—I suppose a steamer is made of iron—never mind. You should not mock, setting out to face the dangers of the deep. Wait until we get out so far that there is no danger of a collision. Mrs. Pritchard and I have been comparing experiences and we agree that sooner or later the feet of clay of the men we make our idols will appear. You know very well that you have all got feet of clay."

"Not my feet only but also my hands and my head—

there's more scripture for you, Mrs. Heber : but I am not mocking."

"You have the good grace to admit the feet of clay."

"I can do so with a clear conscience. We live on a gravel soil in Kensington."

"Do you mean to be enigmatical? Gravel soil? Oh, you give yourselves airs in Kensington—Kensington proper, not the ridiculous West or—but I've known Kensington husbands who were no better than——"

"Kensington proper—you have said it, my dear Mrs. Heber. In Kensington and every other place that is proper——"

"What do you call a proper place—a place where people of property live or a place where the proprieties are observed?"

"All questions of domicile are decided on the basis of slumber. A proper place is a place where propriety—sleeps. But that is not the point."

"What point?"

"The feet of clay. Were you not talking about feet of clay?"

"Some time ago. You dragged in poor Kensington and its gravel soil, as if you were a house agent."

"I only meant to say that we are always on the look out for the feet of clay, so all our houses have scrapers and two sorts of mats."

"More word jugglery! You have been studying Lord Rosebery. What do you mean to say exactly?"

"Only that you and every other well-shaped woman would be frightfully disappointed if you were to marry a man without the feet of clay—you know that and I know it too. Gold is all very well, but it should be on the pedestal of your idol not the composition of your idol. Flesh and blood are clay and you marry flesh and blood, don't you?"

“Talking of flesh—I do hope that I’ll get enough exercise aboard this ship,” said the lady. “I can’t afford to put on another pound.”

And then we went on to talk of obesity, of Christian Science, of Electric Baths, and the Book of Job.

CHAPTER III.

I felt that I should be quite comfortable sitting at the same table as Mrs. Heber and her husband ; Mrs. Heber has the reputation for increasing the general comfort of a party even though her husband may be absent. I am not sure that she increases to any appreciable extent the comfort of her husband, though she does sometimes make long visits to her friends, leaving him at home. Major Heber had the reputation of being the worst billiard player at Aldershot, but he retains a considerable portion of his old nerve at steeple-chasing, for he is ready to declare that Sir Redvers Buller was a very ill-used man.

That was the topic on which he opened when we took our places at the purser's table. (The purser's table is always a safe one). He defended the General on general principles—he had known Buller and served under him, and a better chap didn't exist. All such strong military arguments as that he brought forward while his wife talked to the purser on the red pepper of Nepaul ; and he had it all his own way while the soup was on ; but when there was a pause in the business of the table a man who had been through a campaign or two said—

“ Do you think that Buller was altogether wise in the way he set about defending himself against the attacks that were made upon him ? ”

"Oh, I think that he made rather a fool of himself there," said Major Heber. "But take my word for it, there's no braver man in the British army. I've served under him, sir."

"I wonder what his object was in insisting on the Government publishing that telegram or heliogram of his to White, urging him to scuttle out of Ladysmith, destroying all the stores that he could in the time," said the other man in the accents of an earnest seeker after truth—as much truth as can be got between the removal of the soup and the serving of the fish.

"That was a bit of a mistake," said the Major; "but all the same, he's the bravest soldier that ever——"

"That ever advised—I should say commanded an officer who looked to him for orders, to scuttle," said the other quietly. "No one could understand the mistakes made by Buller until he insisted on the publication of all the papers. Then everyone saw how gross was his incompetence. What are we to think of the leadership of a man who has not even tact enough to know how to defend himself from an attack? A general who has not tact enough to defend himself is not the man to have tactics enough to defend the force with which he is entrusted."

"Well, yes, he did make a bit of an ass of himself," said the Major. "But so far as bravery is concerned, I tell you that Buller never knew what fear was."

"My dear sir, anyone who would say that Buller ever showed a lack of bravery would be a fool; and anyone who would say that his message to White was not a cowardly one would be an imbecile," said the other.

"I don't defend him, sir; but all the same he was very badly treated. I served under him, and I'll stand up for him," said the Major stoutly.

"Your determination does you great honour," said

the other. "You are no fair weather friend, Major. I wish there were more like you."

"Hang it, when a man's down is not the time for his old pals to round on him," cried the Major, and then he drank a whiskey and soda and made a spirited attack on the cod and sauce. (I dare not say what the sauce was. I only know that it was not what the *carte* affirmed it to be.)

Mrs. Heber told me in accents of confidence that she thought the man who had abused Buller was quite horrid.

"That's the penalty that people have to pay for being in the right," said I.

"Oh, it's not that," said she; "it is the way he strokes his moustache. I never knew any good come to a man who stroked his moustache with his little finger standing out like that from his hand."

"Neither did I," said I, and I really never did. I had never associated coming to good with the sticking out of a little finger from the hand that is smoothing down a moustache.

"But we must be grateful to him for having closed that eternal Buller question," said Mrs. Heber. "My husband has talked about nothing else for the past month. He has bored me to extinction and I was afraid that the people aboard this steamer would make a Jonah of him and throw him overboard for the common good."

"The jettison of Jonah represented an extreme step," said I. "Personally I have always regarded it as reprehensible. Still there are occasions——"

"There are. This fish is tough enough to have been the one that swallowed up the prophet," said she. "Talking of swallowing up the profit, I suppose if the company were to give us a better table they would not

be able to make anything off us : but really this fish——”

Then, for fear she should be thought a grumbler she looked across the table at Professor Dugdale in quite a pleasant and impressive way, saying—

“ We have been discussing an old story, Professor Dugdale—the throwing of Jonah overboard. We were not sure that it was quite unjustifiable. What do you think about the transaction ?”

“ It is the finest fable in existence, and it remains so in spite of the gross misrepresentations to which it has been subjected,” replied Professor Dugdale.

“ I hope we didn’t draw the wrong moral : we only came to the conclusion that Jonah’s misfortunes were meant as a warning to bores,” said Mrs. Heber.

“ If that’s true it has failed signally,” said the purser, but without looking at anybody in particular. It would not have been polite to look at anybody in particular. “ It is strange,” he added, “ how people begin to talk about Jonah the moment they get aboard this ship. I have noticed for the past five voyages that he is the topic of this table at the first meal.”

“ And yet you have never had to throw anyone overboard ?”

“ Not even a cook,” replied the purser.

“ That was how you misinterpreted the story,” said the lady.

“ Jonah’s persistent ill-luck has followed him to the present day,” said someone else.

“ Ill-luck ? Now, I think that Jonah was the luckiest man that ever lived,” cried Mrs. Heber.

“ Next to Thomas Smith,” said someone else. “ You remember the case of Thomas Smith, who had murdered his sister and strangled his aunt for an electro-plated teapot; but the jury brought in a verdict of manslaughter. ‘ Thomas Smith,’ said the judge, ‘ you are the luckiest

man I ever met in all my life. Take penal servitude for life ! ”

It was Major Heber who at this point told the story of the Boston harpooner whose boat was smashed by a bull-whale, and its occupants flung high into the air. “ I went head foremost into the jaws of the thing,” said the original narrator, “ and down his throat. It was five or six minutes before I managed to pull myself together, and then I found myself in what seemed to be a fine roomy cavern. It was very dark, so I pulled out a match, struck it on the leg of my pants and looked around. I was struck all of a heap when I saw lying on a shelf a jack-knife, and just above it there was carved the name ‘ Jonah,’ and the date B.C. 782 ! I had often heard of whales living to a big age, but there was a proof that no one would reasonably look for. And if any of you doubt the truth of what I have told you here’s the jack-knife. I brought it with me when I left in case I should confront a sceptic.”

“ There’s an older fish story extant than that of Jonah,” said the man who had given his views so freely on the subject of Sir Redvers Buller. “ It is carved on one of the stones at Bala lake in Egypt, and it was venerable before Jonah was born. The carving represents two men carrying between them on a pole a fish whose tail trails along the ground. Egyptologists say that that is a proof that at one time fish six feet in length were in Bala lake. To my mind it is only a proof that there were some pretty rigid fish stories even in those days.”

“ The fable of Jonah has been grossly misinterpreted,” said Professor Dugdale. “ But then think of the others that have been subjected to the same treatment of perversion. What is the real moral of the story of the Prophet Elisha and the children that mocked him ? ”

he enquired, looking round the table as if we had all been students in his class-room.

"I suppose it is that every prophet should buy somebody's Hair Restorer," suggested Mrs. Heber.

"Just think of that wicked, ill-tempered old prophet; because a crowd of children at play point at him and call him a name of inconsiderable opprobrium, he turns round and curses them—actually curses them, not in the casual way of momentary irritation, but well knowing, if he was anything of a prophet at all, what the consequences would be, and—I forget at this moment how many of them the bears slew."

"Forty-two exactly," said Mrs. Heber.

"Thank you. Forty-two! Just think of it—forty-two poor children slain—forty-two households made desolate in order to restore the *amour propre* of a bald-headed Jew! And the worst of it is that our pastors and masters assure us that the lesson taught to us by this lurid incident is that we should not mock at a shiny-pated Sheeny. Preposterous! Everyone knows that the moral is that one should not lose one's temper over trifles. Then there is the story of that noble woman—as true a patriot as Joan of Arc or the Maid of Saragossa—Delilah!"

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Heber. "Delilah, the patriotte?"

"Hers was the act of a woman who was ready to sacrifice all that a woman holds dear in order to deliver her country from the thralldom of that burly butcher sensualist, Samson. Is there no poet who will write a verse to do tardy honour to so great a heroine?"

"I doubt it," said someone mournfully.

"And what about that shocking episode of the Sultan David and the maiden Abishag, the beautiful Shunamite, with whom his youngest son was in love? Have we ever heard a sermon preached against that revolting

crime? Then there was the scandalous case of the traitress Rahab and——”

“Oh, please don’t go on any further; we’ll admit everything,” cried Mrs. Heber. “I had no idea that you were such a Bible student, Professor Dugdale. But of course I should remember that modern science goes hand in hand with the Bible. But I wish that I had not stirred up poor Jonah, but had allowed him to rest in—under the juniper tree. Are we going to have a rough night, Mr. Beddoes? The steamer is inclined to be a little jumpy, isn’t it?”

The purser assured her that whatever the weather might be, no first-class passenger would be jettisoned. It was a rule of the Royal Mail in such an extremity to begin with the second-class passengers, and, even then, valets and ladies’ maids were exempt.

This twelve-knot greyhound of ours was certainly making very poor weather of the channel breeze which we were beginning to feel. Some of us thought that the smoking-room, where there was no piano, would be preferable to the drawing-room, where there was one. We crawled up to the deck, and squeezed ourselves into the round-house—it was a great satisfaction to us, anxious to be assimilated with all the tradition of the Spanish Main, to think of the smoking-room of the *Avon*—the panels picked out with bird’s-eye maple, etc.—as the round-house of the old piratical schooner with the raking masts.

We had an immense yearning after rum—a beverage which I had never tasted except through the unsatisfactory medium of an omelette, and then there was only as much of it as justified the *chef’s* allowing the *au rhum* to appear in the carte: the *chef* had an inexorable conscience. I felt inclined to call upon Darby Magraw, the personal attendant of the redoubtable Captain Flint,

to fetch a whole bottle. But on mature reflection I thought it better to start with a liqueur glassful. One cannot become luridly heroic all at once, so I had my liqueur and found it as Pepys did Nell Gwyn when he surprised her not fully draped in her dressing-room at the theatre, "Very pretty—prettier even than I thought."

The smoking-room was crowded; but I managed to get a seat by the side of a man who was not quite a stranger—a Scot, and, like most of his race, full of humour. At one of the tables in the next alcove—the round-house is built in alcoves surrounding the glass dome of the drawing-room—Major Heber sat with a couple of younger men, and we could hear him say in the firmest of accents—

"I give you my word, he was a very badly treated man. Of course there is no denying that he made an ass of himself, but a braver soldier when he had a job of work to get through never was in the field. Yes, he has been shamefully treated."

I gave a laugh. My Scot winked sagaciously.

"There's a few of us will know something of Buller before we get to Barbados," he whispered.

"I couldn't know less about the way the campaign was carried on even if I were the Secretary for War himself," said I, "but if we hear much more about Buller and his bungling there will be the cry of 'man overboard!' some of these nights, and Major Heber will be missing."

There was a good deal of grumbling going on around us at the rigid way in which the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company adhered to the traditions of their early years. My Scot was most sarcastic in his references to their cash system for drinks. I must confess that I was a little surprised when, on ordering a bottle of something at dinner, the steward-waiter asked me to give

him the money for it. It seemed as if they had never heard of the chit system which prevails aboard every steamer on which I have sailed.

"It's a survival of the days when all the noted buccaneers used to travel by this route," said the Scot. "I believe that they were in the habit of drinking half-a-dozen bottles of rum a day all through the voyage, and when payment was demanded they drew a cutlass or two from their belts—the leather ones with the big brass buckles."

"Yes, the 'once aboard the lugger' pattern."

"Ay, and there was a vacancy for a steward or two before they paid their score. Ay, man, they do well to be careful still."

"The buccaneers are all dead and gone, but there are company promoters still, you think?" said I.

"Ay, and missionaries."

"Well, no doubt they do well to be careful; but their system is very inconvenient."

"Ay, no doot it's inconvenient, but, man, you must mind that the officers of the Company are entitled by their charter to wear side arms," said the Scot.

"Hang it all! I've served under him and that's why I stand up for him. He's all right, only that he makes an ass of himself," came the voice of Major Heber. He was fairly warming to his topic. I felt sure that some morning there would be a vacancy at our table in the saloon.

Conversation within our special alcove soon became general, as it usually does in the smoking-room of a steamer. But there was none of that rapid, vapid talk which is characteristic of the North Atlantic passage, where people feel that they have only five days to get rid of the conversational accumulations of years.

Our chat was not on the "Lemco" principle—a whole

ox boiled down into a cup ; it was rather of the old-fashioned, beef-tea type—simmering, and never reaching boiling point. We all seemed to feel that we were to have a couple of months of each other's company, so we spread the jam on thin, as it were.

I found that the man who sat next to me bore the same name—a rather uncommon one—as a gentleman whom I had met years ago in India—a gentleman who was said to be gifted with an imagination that was practically without a horizon. I ventured to enquire if the two were relations.

“ He was my father,” replied the man beside me, and then he went on to talk about him, telling me that he had died shortly after taking up a good appointment at Singapore. I expressed my regret, and then it turned out that the Scot had also been acquainted with the lamented gentleman in the East.

“ Oh, yes,” he said, “ I came across him once or twice—he was a bit of a li—ahem, ay, he gave us a yarn or two that took away our breath—some of them even took away my breath, and I had at one time a pretty fair county court practice.”

“ He had some strange experiences, poor old dad !” said the son sententiously.

“ Ay, that was the reputation under which he suffered,” said the Scot with a dry twinkle.

I thought that I saw a smile lurking about the corners of the son's mouth and that encouraged me to repeat one of his father's most remarkable stories.

“ He had some curious experiences,” I said. “ I wonder if you ever heard the one he told about the cobra. I was particularly struck by it. He told me one day that he had said to his son, ‘ If ever you want to catch a cobra, don't make a fool of yourself by pouncing on it all at once. If you do the chances are

that it will bite you badly. What you do is to pass your hand gently up its body from the tail and then take a firm grip of its neck and it can't harm you. Strange to say,' your father went on, 'on the very next day after my telling him that old jest, my boy entered the compound in the cool of the evening, trailing in a six foot cobra wriggling and writhing like a whip-pennant in a gale. "Is that the way you meant me to catch him?" he cried, holding up his right arm and showing me that he had caught the cobra by the neck.' "

"Ah, yes," said the son, "I should know that story. It was I who caught that cobra."

There was a long silence after this. But I will say that no one was indecent enough to look at his neighbour or to wink.

It was the Scot who, at last, removed his pipe from his lips and knocked the ashes out of the bowl upon the little tray.

"Ay," he said. "Yon's the voice of the Professor beyond there. He's discoursing on heredity. I'm beginning to think that there's something in it after all."

CHAPTER IV.

There was a good deal of hard smoking in that round-house during the next quarter of an hour. Only a casual remark was made now and again on the unseaworthiness of the steamer. The man whose father we had admired was the first to make the attempt to raise the tone of the conversation from the desultory depth to which it had fallen.

"I wonder if my father ever told you the story of Aylmer and his snakes?" he said, inclining his head in my direction.

Now, what I had been wondering was that the tale of the cobra had not called forth any reminiscences from some of our group. It was the first time that I had ever known of a solitary snake crawling in front of a company more or less unscrupulous.

"No," said I reflectively, "I don't think that he ever mentioned Aylmer. Is it another story that you can vouch for?"

"I don't wonder at some of the queer things one hears about snakes," said the man—his name was Burling. "The fact is that they are uncanny things, and had better not be touched."

"Unless by a firm hand at the back of the neck," suggested the Scot—his name was Aytoun.

"I mean that a person shouldn't devote too much

time to studying them and their ways," said Mr. Burling quietly. "Aylmer was a man in the C.S. who made a pet of one—he had been for some years at one of the loneliest stations in the Bengal Presidency. There were not half-a-dozen people to whom he could speak, and he had no liking for sport. I suppose he was shunted off there because he was known to be a bit queer and uncompanionable. At any rate he made a pet of the thing and got so attached to it that he was never happy unless it was either twisting about his neck or lying on his sofa. He took to playing on the flute to it, and a chap in the Forests told me that he used to pass Aylmer's bungalow at midnight and hear him playing away while the creature danced on a carpet in front of him, and he would pet it in the pauses. This sort of thing went on for a year and Aylmer neglected every scrap of official work—such as it was—that he had to do. When at last someone was sent to make a report upon him, he found the poor devil quite off his head. He was singing love songs to the beast, and, by George, from the way he raved it was perfectly plain that when it stood up dancing before him, he saw it, not as a snake but as a dancing girl, lithe and lissom and entrancing—I've seen some of them that suggested snakes, but I've never seen a snake that suggested a girl."

"And what happened?"

"What could happen? The chap who was sent to make the report, saw that Aylmer was too far gone to be talked to that night; but he sent off for a medico to come on the morning, and went asleep in his room, hearing Aylmer up to the moment when he dropped off, singing away at the top of his voice to his darling, and at intervals calling it all the endearing names in the Persian dictionary, for Aylmer was great on Persian. He slept until morning and then he was awakened by the khit-

mutgar. Aylmer was lying on the floor of his room, dead of a snake bite, and his pet had disappeared. I read a poem which was found among his papers—written to the snake. Curious, isn't it, the horrible fascination which this snake business has upon one?"

"The fable of Lilith has its significance," remarked Professor Dugdale, who had joined our circle. "There is hardly a mythological system that does not include a snake."

"In the one that we know most of the snake plays a prominent part," said Mr. Aytoun.

"I heard of another chap who made pets of snakes," resumed Mr. Burling complacently. "They used to come to the table at breakfast with him, and every one of them knew its own saucer of milk. He had to go home in a hurry leaving them behind him, and it was not until he was parted from his pets that he came to know how closely they had twined themselves round his life. He became depressed and began to mope before he had been at home for more than a month; and when he consulted a specialist he was told that there was nothing for it but to go back to India as soon as possible. He did so and he is there alive and well to-day."

"And are the snakes thriving also?"

"I can't say for certain. You see the chap got married, and his wife gave one of the grooms twenty annas to cut their heads off."

"Who was the specialist? I didn't know that there was any specialist on snake diseases," said someone with a carping tendency.

"Oh, ay; I have known of some," said Aytoun. "I heard of one being consulted in a case that bore a striking resemblance to the one quoted by Mr. Burling; the patient had come to Scotland and was pining away through leaving his snakes behind him. His friends

called in the specialist, and he said that unless the man got back to his snakes his life wouldn't be worth a month's purchase."

"And he went back to them?"

"No; you see his folk were Scots and a bit near."

"Near? Near what?"

"Near—near—close-fisted—economical, you would call it—and so after consultation they bought him a jar of leeches to try if they would have any effect upon him—you see they were cheap."

"Quite so."

"Ay; and he was cheered up a bit for a time. But the effect wore off, and he became lonesome once more. Then they went a bit further and tried what a basket of live eels would do for him."

"And did they do for him?"

"Ay, for a time; but he got bad again and they sent for another specialist. He diagnosed the case at once, and agreed with his brother that without snakes the man would die. But he said that there was no need for him to leave home: he would send some medicine round that would produce the desired effect, and the next morning a quarter cask labelled 'Old Highland Malt' arrived with directions for one tumblerful, slightly diluted with water, to be taken every hour, day and night."

"And the result?"

"He hadn't been following the specialist's advice for more than a month when he saw all the snakes that he had ever been accustomed to, and more—and he was as happy (in its Scots signification) as he could wish."

"It took him a whole month to effect his cure?" said a carper.

"Ay. Didn't I mention at the outset that he was a Scot?" said Mr. Aytoun.

"Curiously enough," said the doctor, "when we were leaving Demerara last trip a young Scotsman who was coming back with us as a passenger wanted to bring aboard with him a good sized rattle-snake which he had in a cage; but the Captain would not allow it to be brought up the hand-rail, and the man was forced to send it ashore again. But he had his revenge, for he smuggled aboard the most virulent set of bagpipes I ever heard, and he used to play pibrochs and things in his cabin for hours at a time. The passengers, after a day or two, said if they had to choose between the pibroch and the rattle-snake they would have had the latter."

That was the last of the stories. We heard eight bells strike and Mr. Aytoun suddenly remembered that his glass had not been filled for some time. He was informed that he could not be served with another drink; the bar was closed at six bells.

The Scot was indignant. "Was there ever such a fossilized company as the Royal Mail?" he enquired. Did they ever expect to pay a dividend to the unfortunate shareholders?

But there was no help for it: he had to turn in without having another drink. Personally I do not think that he had any reason to be absolutely thirsty.

"Oh, may there be no closing of the Bar
When I put out to sea,"

were his last words before entering his cabin.

There was a good deal of vibration throughout the steamer that night, the fact being that the channel was rather lumpy. I felt inclined to agree with the city surveyor who reported that the Atlantic was badly out of repair and recommended a steam-roller. Before many hours had passed I was in a position to bring one particular steam-roller under the notice of any Atlantic

vestry that might need such a machine. But I think that I might have contrived to snatch a sleep of an hour or two at the intervals of the steam-roller's tumbling into the trough of the seas, had it not been for the vigilance of the engine-room staff. Every quarter of an hour during the night and all through the dreary, sleepless morning there came from the engine-room—my cabin was amidships—a very demon's tattoo played by a resonant iron saucepan on the blade of an iron furnace feeder. Every fifteen minutes with painful punctuality I was in a position to realize what it is to superintend the riveting of the plates of a boiler, or to appreciate the reasons for the stupefaction of a swarm of bees when the bee-wife batters on her tray.

I learned afterwards that this was the signal of one set of stokers to those on the opposite side that they were about to stoke. Should any doubt have been entertained as to the regularity with which they performed their duty on this night, it would have been in my power to dispel such doubt. After an hour or two I was able to analyse my feelings on the subject of the tattoo, and I was in a position to affirm that it was not so much the noise itself that kept me awake, as the painfully expectant waiting for it to be resumed during the interval that the stokers were pulling themselves together for a new effort. Like Eugene Aram, I stared aghast at sleep all that night, and long before morning I had come to the conclusion that the illustrations of the tortures of the Mediæval Hades which illuminate the frescoes in the Campo Santo at Pisa, could be materially augmented.

I still think, however, that I might have snatched an hour's sleep out of the Pandemonium of the engine-room, had it not been for the diligence and energy with which the decks were scrubbed just above my head.

It is well known that a spring-cleaning is conducted on a heroic scale every morning aboard every steamer that sails on the sea ; but that which began at five o'clock on the decks of the *Avon* was the most drastic under which I have ever lain awake. It made me fidgety.

Before six a.m. I was prepared to suggest a still further augmentation of the lurid frescoes of the Campo Santo.

When, an hour later, I tumbled out of my bunk I found that the hot water pipe by which the cabins are rendered stifling, if thought necessary, had leaked badly during the night. I stepped into three inches of water, and found that the lower portion of my deck trunk and the whole of my camera were submerged at intervals as the water maintained its level but the deck of the cabin did not.

More frescoes !

" Ay," said my friend Aytoun, when I gave him a list of my sufferings, " ay, man, this all sounds bad enough, but you must mind that the officers of the Royal Mail are entitled by their charter to wear side arms."

" I can quite understand why the privilege was granted to them : it is to give them a chance of defending their lives against the indignation of the passengers," said I. " But I fancy that the officers suffer as much as we do. It is the directors who might claim the right to carry revolvers."

I found out in the course of time that my surmise was true. I never met an officer in this service who did not strike me as being a most capable and intelligent man. But the control department was a monument of incapacity. Since I took my voyage there has been a revolt of shareholders. I can say for certain that the sympathies of all the passengers with whom I came in contact are on the side of the revolutionists.

The attendance at breakfast on the first morning at

sea was rather meagre. Professor Dugdale, however, put in an appearance at our table and Major Heber, carefully concealing whatever freshness he may have felt. Mrs. Heber had taken pains with her toilet, and was as appropriate as usual. The purser had the aspect of a man who is the recipient of many complaints, confidential and open, but who has no complaint to make to anyone on his own account. Indeed it is difficult to see how a purser can complain. There is no one to whom he can apply for an ear of sympathy. A purser should be perpetually clad in oilskins—the mental equivalent to the tarpaulin. The stream of complaints which daily descends upon him should be diverted into channels and then allowed to drain off.

I rather think that purser Beddoes of the *Avon* has mastered the science of surface drainage by this time. I said something to him involving a reference to elementary hydrostatics. He winked confidentially, saying—
“A duck’s back.”

Of course every purser aboard a passenger steamer is held responsible for bad weather. The weather is entirely within his department, and he accepts the responsibility with a light heart. He admits that it is bad, but not half so bad as it was the voyage before; and it is perfectly certain to clear up within a day or two. Would we not have entered the Tropics? he enquires, in answer to enquirers: and of course we all feel as cheerful as if we were on land sitting down to our morning pipes and papers.

Mr. Beddoes is a man of wide experience of men and women, Presidents of South American republics, and negroes. He told me two stories. One had reference to a republic, the other to a negro. It appears that when Brazil was about to declare itself a republic, the way the officials showed themselves to be in deadly

earnest was by filing the imperial crown off their brass buttons. They filed away all through one night, expecting that the revolution would take place at the exact time stated in the official programme of the revolutionaries : if a republic fails in punctuality in regard to its birth how can it be depended on later ? But in the morning it was found necessary to postpone the carrying out of the plot for some time, and there were the officials left with the crownless buttons on their jackets and no possibility of replacing them : for the astute shopkeepers, feeling that a revolution was about due, had refrained from laying in any stock of imperial crowned buttons. The consequence was that for some days all who were entitled to wear buttons were keeping out of the way of those of the Imperial party who might reasonably be supposed to possess the Imperial attribute of the eagle-eye. The revolution was actually precipitated to save the brass buttons of the custom house staff.

The negro story was very pleasing to Professor Dugdale, who had been discoursing in a very interesting way on the descent of man—from the trees where he had lived for some hundred thousand years or so. Now, the whole argument in regard to the arboreal origin of man turns upon the prehensile toe, though some say that it hangs on to the reprehensible tail. The tail had been atrophied out of existence, and so had the toe, Professor Dugdale assured us.

“ Oh, no, sir,” said the purser. “ The prehensile toe is still in pretty fair working order, I can assure you. Last voyage I was shaving in my cabin one morning when the steamer was lying off Dominica. I was giving all my attention to the square of looking-glass in front of me, when my port became suddenly obscured. I did not look round for a moment, fancying that it was merely the sail of a cargo boat passing close to the ship’s

side that darkened the cabin. But hearing a queer scraping sound behind me I turned, and I can tell you that I got something of a start to see a human leg, coal black, thrust from the outside through the port, and feeling its way gingerly and with all the toes moving like the fingers of a hand round the brush and comb and the other articles on my shelf until they came upon my watch and chain. They became rigid over the case of the watch which they daintily picked up from the shelf, the chain hanging down. The leg was being slowly withdrawn and positively I was too stupefied to do anything for a moment ; then, recovering myself, I made a slash at the leg with my razor. Down crashed the watch, there was a yell outside and a splash in the water. I ran to the port and was just in time to see a big nigger climb over the gunwale of one of the flat-bottomed, coffin-shaped cots which swarm alongside the steamer at nearly all the islands. I saw with satisfaction that the rascal's left leg had a gash on it a good two inches long. That was all right, so I finished my shaving—after I had wiped and restropped the razor, for I had spoilt its edge. There was a prehensile toe for you, Professor Dugdale. I have seen a nigger pick up with his toes an extra ace from where he had placed it ready for such an emergency when engaged in a friendly game of cards—that was all in the day's work ; but I thought that prehensilliness was going a little too far when it came to trifle with the watch and chain on my cabin shelf."

Professor Dugdale was delighted with this evidence of the survival of what he had believed to be a lost art.

I complimented the purser on having a story ready for any emergency—a life-buoy sort of story which he could detach at a moment's notice for the rescue of a messmate from a sea of dullness.

CHAPTER V.

I found my deck-chair and placed it to the lee of the companion ; and before long the seat next to mine was taken by Mr. Ormsby, the elderly gentleman whom I had noticed at lunch with the very pretty daughter. The very pretty daughter had not appeared at breakfast I had noticed with regret.

We immediately began to talk, and I found that he was quite pleasantly communicative. Before lunch he had told me that he was not taking the voyage for his health—no, he had other reasons. He had been advised—he gave an enigmatical little laugh, dwelling upon the word *advised*—to try what the effect of a long voyage would be upon—well, upon a family matter.

I could not say that his explanation was wholly lucid. This definition of the experiment which he was trying was a trifle indefinite. What could be the effect of a long sea voyage upon so vague an abstraction as a family matter was certainly open to conjecture. But I thought that I would not be very wide of the mark were I to assume until we got on a little further, that the abstract family matter was susceptible of identification with a very pretty daughter. Had he been advised to find out what effect a long sea voyage would have upon his daughter ?

Was it a case of neurosis, I wondered. Had Miss

Ormsby been worrying herself, as so many young women do nowadays, over some "mission"? Had she been puzzling herself into a fever over some "message" which she felt that she should give to the world? Or was it simply district visiting and labourers' cottages?

I came to the conclusion that it was nothing serious, for I recollected the little laugh which the father had given when referring to the family matter; so I nodded to let him know that I recognized that family matters were sometimes not easily explained to a stranger.

I knew that he would confide in me—up to a certain point—possibly up to the point of being interesting—before long. I should have been greatly disappointed if he had refrained from doing so. There is scarcely anything that a man will not confide to another aboard a ship, just as there is nothing that a woman will not communicate to so sympathetic an auditor as the attendant at the waiting-room of a railway terminus, or the young lady who comes to massage her.

Of course we hastened to talk of the West Indian Islands, but I soon found that he took very little interest in this topic. He supposed that the islands were very beautiful. If so, he feared that they must be the breeding ground of mosquitoes. He hoped that the heat would not be excessive—he suffered greatly in hot weather. He did not mind cold. He had bathed in the open air until a year or two ago, as late as November. Of course it was all habit. He rather wished that he had tried a voyage to Australia; but Australia was so very far away. It seemed like cutting oneself off from everything. In his young days the voyage to Australia took seven months. He had a brother who had taken seven months to go to Calcutta, and that was only forty years ago, mind. He had no wish to go to India or Japan. As a matter of fact, if anyone had told him six

months ago that he would be at this time crossing the Atlantic for pleasure—well, no, it could hardly be called pleasure—but he hoped for the best. . . . It had been his wife's idea ; and if she did not understand what was best for their daughter, who could ? Well, well, girls are queer things—but he had every hope—his daughter was his daughter, and her mother was a sensible woman. It was a pity that she was not a better sailor, in that case she would be aboard the *Avon* at that moment. His daughter was suffering, but not so much as he had expected she would. It really had been a very bad night, and there seemed to be a consensus of opinion among the passengers that the steamer was not a good sea boat. The purser had told him that the Tropics would be reached in a day or two, and then of course it would be all right.

I acquiesced in the purser's opinion, and awaited further confidences. They quickly came. Like every other person who is anxious to become an agreeable companion, Mr. Ormsby was ever in search of an audience with a sympathetic ear to whom he could confide the story of his life. He paid me the compliment of assuming my sympathy ; and he did not make a mistake on this particular point. My sympathies are ever with an elderly man of no special intellectual resources, who undertakes the management of a daughter with such eyes as those of Miss Ormsby.

And this, I soon found out, was what my companion had done. He told me that he lived in a town in the Midlands, where he had made a competence—he used the word *competence*, but he made a little pause, and gave a little smile before pronouncing it, and from this fact I gathered that he had made a fortune by his business—not merely an ordinary London fortune, but a Midlands fortune. He had had a struggle for a good

many years, of course, but happily a war or two taking place at the right time had been of so much advantage to him that he had suddenly found himself in a position to get married and to retire from the active management of the business which he had built up. He had, however, taken the precaution to float the concern after the third year's most successful trading, and he assured me that he had no reason to regret taking this step. Trade is fluctuating. It is best to get rid of a business when it is at its best and not when it begins to decline. Fortunately he was not materially affected by the falling off in his business as soon as it had been floated.

He gave me some excellent advice, financial and fiduciary, before telling me that his daughter was his only child. Her education had caused him much anxiety—indeed he thought that no one who had ever tried the experiment would doubt that a daughter was a much more serious responsibility to a father than a son would be. To be sure, a son when he got on a bit was always liable to throw money about. A neighbour of his had quite recently been forced to pay six thousand pounds to save his son from an extortion—oh, the old story—only she was particularly clever in this case, and had got the young fellow to sign a paper But a daughter—well, the danger with a daughter was the possibility of her forming an attachment to an adventurer—some fellow who hoped to have something to say to the spending of her fortune. Now that was the very mischief—girls are easily imposed upon. They did not value in the least the sterling qualities in a man. A young jackanapes with a waxed moustache and plenty of shirt cuff—that was the sort of fellow who was attractive to a girl, if he had read aright certain books that purported to deal with this matter.

I wondered what guide books he had been studying,

but I did not interrupt his narration, and slowly and sadly he told me that he greatly feared that his daughter was no exception to the susceptible class which he was bringing under my notice. He assured me that no one could have been more careful than he had been, not merely in warning her against adventurers with waxed moustaches, but in preventing her from coming in contact with any such fellows. He had never allowed her to go out alone from the time she was fifteen—that was some years ago; and her mother had been most careful as to the men with whom she danced—there is a great deal of gaiety in the Midlands—when dancing was unavoidable. In spite of all this care and attention, she had had no fewer than three proposals in as many years.

All of them had been moderately impecunious, and therefore ineligible. Fortunately Myra—that was his daughter's name—cared for none of them; and her father was hoping that she would maintain the reputation for good sense which she had thereby acquired in his eyes, when in an evil hour she had gone on a visit to her aunt—her mother's sister—in London, and although her mother had been with her all the time, she had contrived to fall in love with a young fellow whom she had met one evening, and who had taken her and her aunt's party to some theatre and then to some preposterously expensive restaurant with palms and a string band, to supper.

And her mother had been with her all the time—that was the curious part of it. Her mother was a woman of great intelligence, but he feared, with only a small amount of knowledge of the world. He could not blame her. It was her suggestion that he and his daughter should go on a long sea voyage—that would at any rate separate the girl from her lover for some months, and

this was the most important thing. It would at least show the fellow that he, the father, was in earnest. It would also show the girl that he was in earnest.

I said, "Quite so," and he seemed quite pleased. I did not like to ask him as to the items of ineligibility of the pretender. I felt that to do so would be to suggest that I was anxious to pry into the most sacred of my neighbour's affairs, and everyone knows that it is the man who prys who learns least.

I was dying to hear the details of the detrimental—the story of the detrimental is invariably the one that interests a reader, and the more details of his detrimentality that can be given the better is one satisfied. In this case, however, I knew that I might trust to the indiscretion of the father to interest me in such particulars at a later period of our acquaintance. He had done very well during the couple of hours that we had been together.

"A girl is undoubtedly a great responsibility, sir," I said, just to let him know that I regarded this as the moral of his story: I was merely repeating his own phrase.

He shook his head, uplifting his hands—his attitude was one of abject acquiescence—such an acquiescence as men only show in a truth that has come from their own lips.

"A great responsibility!" he murmured. After a pause he turned suddenly to me saying in a more confidential tone still—

"Don't you think that Mrs. Ormsby's notion was a good one—separating the pair, you know? You see, the poor girl has never been from home. She thought it a great thing no doubt when the first man that she met in London proposed to her. Of course we in the Midlands know the exact value of London folk; but it

would be too much to expect that a girl situated as my daughter was should do other than take them at their own valuation. Don't you think that this knocking about the world will cure her of her folly, eh?"

I thought of what the commercial gentleman had said while we were still alongside the quay at Southampton, on the stimulating effect of travel upon the mind, and I said—

"I think that there is nothing that so opens the eyes of people to the realities of life as travel."

"I'm so glad that you think so: I value your opinion very highly, sir," he said.

"You do me honour," I said. "I hope that everything will turn out satisfactorily. Miss Ormsby is a singularly attractive girl, if I may be permitted to say so, and, as you have just mentioned, she is your only daughter. It would be a great pity if—if——"

"If she were to throw herself away upon the first adventurer who had his eye upon her money—that is what you were about to say?"

"Quite so—you have said exactly what is in my mind. There is no disguising the fact that a young woman is either made extremely happy or extremely miserable by marriage, and that is why her parents . . ."

I really could not press out the platitude to its full length; my companion seized upon the fag end of it as eagerly as if it had been a precious truth which I was formulating for the first time.

"That's it—that's just it," he cried. "I knew the first moment that I spoke to you that you were a man of intelligence. I wonder if it would be too much—that is, if it would be quite in your line to say a word or two to my daughter on this subject, should it ever turn up in the course of conversation? She would listen to anything you said, I am sure, sir."

This flattery I felt to be cloying ; but it was so innocently flung at me, it counted for nothing. I wondered if making money was the recreation of innocent people in the Midlands. I had always been of the belief that astuteness was the main essential to any practical scheme of making money at the expense of the less astute.

"I am afraid that Miss Ormsby would regard my interference in the light of an impertinence—and she would be right," said I.

"Oh, you have not quite grasped my meaning," he cried quickly. "I said, only should conversation turn in the direction of—of—whatever we were talking about. I hope that you don't think that I have taken a great liberty in making such a suggestion to you, sir."

"On the contrary, my dear sir, I feel immensely flattered, I assure you," I replied. "Only—well, you see, girls are not as a rule so communicative as—as they might be, but should Miss Ormsby give me a chance of expressing my opinion on any point that needs—needs—well, that needs an expression of opinion, I think that you may depend on my saying to her something of what I have said to you."

This was certainly vague and non-compromising ; but he received my assurance with enthusiasm.

"I should be deeply grateful to you," he said in a low voice, for there was a glimpse of sunshine on the water in the distance, and some of our shipmates had come close to us to observe the phenomenon : he wished the subject of our conversation to be in some measure confidential.

Then we rose together, and held on to the bulwarks with one hand and to our caps with the other while we gazed out across the waves—brown and murky, with here and there a dash of dirty green in a hollow and a flash of soapy froth making an artificial curl on the

summit—to where a broad ray of colourless winter sunshine overbalanced itself from the edge of a flying cloud. There was a quivering of silver on the water out in the distance, and, after a few moments of ever-shifting, ever-varying light, there was a gleam upon the sails of a ship that seemed to leap into the light. That was all. But the effect was cheering, and it gave something like an artistic finish to a conversation that was becoming somewhat embarrassing to me, though apparently not so to my companion.

But then it must be remembered that during the morning I had played the part of the listener, while Mr. Ormsby had conducted the conversation. It is not the fluent conversationalist who feels embarrassed ; it is the one on whom devolves the interpretation of the more important rôle of the interested auditor.

On the whole I felt grateful to the rift in the cloud and the sliding wisp of sunshine, though I also felt that I had given to me by that father the first thread of a little romance, which I hoped that I might be able to wind up to the last strand on a spool, so to speak.

At lunch Mrs. Heber wanted badly to know if I had come across anyone interesting aboard, and I was able to assure her that I had come across an innocent gentleman who had made a fortune in business in the Midlands.

She was incredulous ; but quite ready to be informed as to how he had done it.

“ It is necessary to be innocent at the start,” said I.

“ Oh, then, the revelation was no use to you,” she said with a slyness, which, quite apart from the point of her remark, was very pleasant to submit to.

That was why I sighed, and stroked my grey patch, murmuring an “ alas.”

“ I hope his daughter will soon be able to leave her cabin,” said Mrs. Heber ; and her remark let me know

that she had noticed my proximity to Mr. Ormsby half the morning. "He does not say that she is very ill, does he?"

"I gather from a remark or two he let drop that the daughter is in no immediate danger; but how on earth did you know that she was his daughter and not his wife?" I enquired.

"I asked the advice of the stewardess on this point," she replied. "In addition I talked to the young woman for close upon half an hour when you were swapping imbecilities with your friends in the smoking-room last night. She is a charming girl, and I shouldn't wonder if she had a story."

"Is it possible? Do not raise my expectations. A story—and from the Midlands."

"Why not? Why should the Midlands be exempt from all that makes one's life interesting?"

"A story interwoven with one's life makes it interesting—to other people. Did Miss Ormsby give you an outline of hers? I suppose she had her heart set upon a wealthy, middle-aged company promoter, and her guardians insist on her marrying a poor young electrical engineer."

"I don't think that it can be on those lines. She is too sweet a girl to be capable of anything so original. Besides, she is delighted at the prospect of a voyage to the West Indies."

I could not but smile, thinking of the adroitness of that young thing being more than a match for Mrs. Heber's worldly experience: she had given Mrs. Heber to understand that the prospect of the voyage was delightful to her.

"Why do you smile in that way?" the worldly-wise one enquired. It seemed that I could not keep even my smile to myself.

"I was thinking that that was last night," I replied.
"I wonder if every prospect pleases this morning?"

She joined me in my smile; but I was not clever enough to be able to say whether she was smiling at my innocence in trying to deceive her in regard to my smile, or simply because I had suggested to her a melancholy picture of a cabin sofa with a stewardess trying to show her sympathy for the sufferer.

I might have given away the secret of the Ormsby family under the pressure of Mrs. Heber's cross questioning, only for the purser's coming unconsciously to my relief with a story of the directorate of the company.

"It was after the voyage before last," said this officer.
"One of the directors—a gentleman who had never been aboard a steamer in his life except on the ocean service between Dover and Calais—made up his mind that he would be very thorough in the discharge of his duties, so he began by asking for the engineer's reports of the voyage and the captain's log. He had no remark to make regarding the former, they were Greek to him; but he found the captain out before he had gone very far. 'Gentlemen,' he said, to the other members of the Board, 'I have been particularly struck by the condition of things prevailing aboard our steamers. Knowing all that I know now, I can only say that I am surprised that some great disaster has not taken place long ago, considering the way that the men who are responsible for the safety of the ships and the human souls aboard, discharge their duties. On every page of every log book that I have examined I find the entry, 'Bridge, six to eight bells,' or 'Bridge till sunrise.' That is a pretty frank confession, gentlemen—a pretty brazen confession, I have no hesitation in calling it; for I have observed that it was just when the master of

a steamer might reasonably be supposed to be most vigilant—when the vessel in his charge is approaching land, and it is so necessary to take surroundings, we find that they are playing Bridge sometimes for four hours at a time. Gentlemen, I hope that you will join with me in putting down this practice with a strong hand ! ”

I felt greatly obliged to Mr. Beddoes for his opportune narration. It started the topic of Bridge, and no incipient love story had a chance of reaching adolescence in the face of such competition. I had to do no more smiling to conceal the confidences with which I had been entrusted. Within a few minutes Mrs. Heber had forgotten that we had been talking of Miss Ormsby—she had forgotten everything save only the possibility of establishing a Bridge party on a sure foundation.

I felt it better to vacate the chair next to Mr. Ormsby on deck ; the fact being that I thought that I had had enough of his story to go on with for some time. I was selfish enough to feel that it would be more or less awkward for me to be overburdened with confidences, though I could not deny that I was interested in some measure with all that he had communicated to me.

I found that I had no need to feel that my selfishness would mean the isolation of Mr. Ormsby. I found him after dinner in the smoking-room in close conversation, though I could not believe that it involved an exchange of confidences, with a young man who wore spectacles and was generally very presentable—his name was Jaffray and he was giving respectful attention to all that Mr. Ormsby was saying. He offered his cigar-case to Mr. Ormsby and Mr. Ormsby called for whiskies and sodas.

My Scot was once again my companion in the smoking-room, and he had discovered a rather interesting little

man, who wore a good-sized diamond stud which shone like a silver lake out of the depths of the rugged cliffs of the astrachan collar of his overcoat. He smoked immense cigars, very rank of flavour and generous of nicotine.

My friend Aytoun introduced me, and when I heard that he was Colonel Laurence, I recollected having seen his portrait in some of the illustrated papers in connection with the lecturing tour of a celebrity of the hour. Colonel Laurence was the head of a lecture agency. The moment that a man had attained notoriety by writing a notorious book, or a woman had bounced into fame, using the Divorce Court as a spring-board, the agent of the Universal Lecture Bureau secured him and her for a tour through the United States. The Bureau had no rooted objection to intellectuality now and again, but being business men they knew perfectly well that intellectuality cannot compete with notoriety as a draw.

Colonel Laurence said so quite frankly when he had lighted his third cigar of exceeding rankness.

"Our ideal lecturer is a Dean of the Church of England who has killed his wife for conscience' sake," he said with a dreamy look of unrealized ambition in his eyes. "A handsome blonde who has run away from her husband in order to be free to run a new religion, sir, a fortune is waiting for her in the States. But we don't object to a poet who is the sole survivor of the wreck of an Atlantic Liner."

"You have never thought of forcing their hands," said I.

"I don't quite see——"

"I only mean to enquire if it has never occurred to you to—well, to give some of them a helping hand to fame by arranging for incidents containing all the

elements out of which the needed notoriety shall spring ?”

“There’s money in that idea,” said he thoughtfully. “If I take you up right you would hint at the possibility of fomenting a quarrel between the Dean and his wife over the Athanasian Creed or sinking the Liner for the sake of creating a sole survivor ?”

“Well, does your Bureau not possess an execution department ?”

“Give us time, sir : we are young yet : I admit there’s business in your notion, but until we feel our feet well under us, we must be content to work on the haphazard principle of picking up notoriety as it appears.”

“It seems to me that there is no need to resort to any artificial means to stimulate the growth,” remarked Mr. Aytoun dryly. “So far as I am able to judge the supply of notoriety is still abundant.”

“We don’t complain, sir,” said Colonel Laurence. “I believe that there will be enough to go round for some time yet if economically used. I hope before I die to have Royalty on my list.”

“You might begin with the Balkan States,” I suggested, “and feel your way up from that.”

The Colonel shook his head, and smiled with great gentleness.

“You haven’t mastered the first principles of success in our line, sir,” said he. “There’s no such thing with us as working up or feeling our way. No, sirree ; we come upon the public with a burst, or do nothing at all. We’ll burst our Royalty upon those simple republicans or let it alone. An Emperor—that’s my ambition. I wouldn’t insult the nation by offering them an ordinary Royal Highness. ‘The Confessions of an Emperor’—see that on a hoarding—red capitals on a purple ground ?”

Colonel Laurence wiped the emotion from his forehead and sighed.

"You'll do it yet, Colonel," said Aytoun encouragingly. "You have pulled off some good things since you were bankrupt over that operatic venture that you told me of long ago."

"I did not know that you had ever been an impresario," said I.

"I was once young," said the Colonel. "I fancied that there was money in Art."

"Oh, you thought to combine Art and artistes? Well, there are some people who think that literature and the stage can be associated with profit."

"I don't," said the Colonel, "at least not now."

CHAPTER VI.

At last we were in the 'Tropics : I felt sure that even the *Avon* would eventually reach the 'Tropics if she only held out long enough. The officers appeared in spotless tunics. This is the compliment which they pay to the Parallels irrespective of the weather. We were under awnings, and we found them very convenient, not because they decreased the risk of sunstroke, but by reason of the shelter they afforded us from the rain. We blustered into Cancer and found that the temperature was that of Virgo and the atmosphere that of Aquarius. Passengers in overcoats complained bitterly to the purser.

And then one morning we came on deck and found the steamer sliding along through a still blue sea, beneath a still blue sky. The gentle flip of a flying fish sounded from the ripples over which we were looking in delight, and about mid-day Mr. Burling brought a crowd to the port quarter to witness the combat of a whale and a thrasher. It was a sight not to be seen every day, and Mrs. Pritchard in the exuberance of the novelty, ran to the smoking-room where her husband was playing Bridge with some veterans.

"A fight between a thrasher and a whale?" her husband repeated. "Who told you about it, my dear?"

"Mr. Burling: he was looking over the side, and saw——"

"Oh, no, I won't stir on any report of Mr. Burling," said her husband with the laugh of a sceptic.

"But it's there—it's going on out there."

"If it had come from any one except Mr. Burling—I believe that I would look for it even on the word of the purser—but Mr. Burling—oh, no. Pass me the other pack, Aytoun."

Mrs. Pritchard declared that never again would she tell her husband what was going on, even though it was a ship on fire.

He thanked her in the courteous manner of husbands, and she went away with a whisk.

The fact was that Mr. Burling had during the week been making some rather erudite discoveries both in the air and the ocean. He had no reluctance in communicating them to his fellow-passengers morning after morning, for as luck would have it, his finest efforts were achieved in solitude.

He had caught sight of a sword-fish when glancing out of his cabin port one morning, and he gave so circumstantial an account of the monster, that anyone could have identified this particular one out of a whole piscatorial armoury. He had seen a shark make an attempt to follow and swallow a flying-fish in mid-air. He had seen a huge turtle swimming strongly southward, and when the story came my length it contained the apocryphal addition to the effect that the turtle had raised a fin to its head saying, "Clear or thick, sir?"

He had not yet apprised us of his discovery of the serpent, but we were expecting this every day.

After the turtle story Mr. Burling, for some reason or other, went by the name of de Rougemont in the saloon of the *Avon*. No one ever alluded to him by any other

title. Indeed from the self-depreciatory way in which he smiled when someone addressed him under the name of the eminent naturalist who published his adventures with turtles and tattoos some years ago, I was pretty sure that he felt flattered by this subtle allusion to his gifts. At any rate he was the means of stimulating the imagination of some of his shipmates, for every day a new story was circulated and the authorship attributed to him, and once when the dinner *menu* was crowned with "*Soup—Mock Turtle*," several copies of the carte were found to contain the additional words "*à la de Rougemont Burling*."

It was rumoured that Colonel Laurence had made him an offer for a lecturing tour in the States.

Our plunge into sunshine brought about a considerable change in the conditions under which we were living. The whole saloon seemed to feel the effects of the warmth. Professor Dugdale explained to us with his customary lucidity that man's entrance upon a long course of criminality synchronized with his migration from the warm climate where he originated to the regions of fluctuating temperatures, which necessitated his killing animals in order to appropriate their furs, and eating their flesh to supply warmth to his body. The first man-migrant was undoubtedly Cain, he added, and his enforced migration was the bitterest part of the curse that had been laid upon him. We all owed Cain a grudge to-day, Professor Dugdale assured us, and the rheumatic ones among us cordially agreed with him.

But undoubtedly the sunshine that, as did the gentle rain from heaven to the Antient Mariner, slid into our souls, made us tolerant even to Cain. We entered with spirit into all those active games which we reserve for hot weather. We got up bean-bag tournaments, cricket, ball, and hockey, and there was quite a run upon lemon

squashes. After dinner we forsook the smoking-room for the deck, and Captain Pellew, the young officer of Dragoons who had never been known to speak to anyone aboard, except a steward, and who had sat down every evening in the saloon with his mother to play Patience, actually ventured on deck in the moonlight, and having a bit of the recklessness of the ideal cavalry leader about him, he did not hesitate to smoke a cigarette.

With the arrival of the fine weather one of the most remarkable incidents of the voyage took place. I have already referred to Miss Ethel Hope, the beautiful girl who was chaperoned with such depressing conscientiousness by the Krux family supplemented by Mr. Sowerby. The vigilance of these dragons in regard to this golden apple of girlhood was positively revolting, and it certainly was referred to in adequate terms by some of the passengers (male), and I fancied that now and again I noticed indications of rebellion on the part of the young woman herself. I could not wonder at it. She was not permitted to walk alone across the deck; if the female dragon failed to accompany her, one of the males—sometimes both—took her in charge, and upon no occasion had she a chance of speaking to anyone unless for a few moments at a time.

This excerpt from a page of a mediæval history went on for a week, and it could not have been otherwise than discouraging to the two young men and the one middle-aged, who, after finding out that the beautiful girl intended going on the tour of the northern islands, went in secret to the purser (separately) asking him if it would be all the same if they were to change their route—they had meant to go southward, to Trinidad and Venezuela, on arriving at Barbados; but they thought that on the whole the northern route would suit them better.

It undoubtedly must have been depressing to these

thoughtful gentlemen to be permitted only to gaze at the golden girl, and I happen to know that one of them at least was driven to the verge of desperation by the vigilance of the dragons ; and I made him promise me to do nothing rash—nothing that would cause a shock to the more sensitive of our fellow-passengers. Bloodshed was unfortunately necessary—nay, even commendable at times, and I for one refused to say that, looked at from a reasonably social standpoint, the slaughter of either Mr. Sowerby or Mr. Krux or both, would not be a deed to reflect upon with satisfaction in after years ; still I felt sure that, looked at from the standpoint of technique, any act that involved violence would be regarded by the rest of the passengers as unfriendly.

The youth said that I had put the matter to him in an entirely new light, and he promised to spare the Kruxes for the present, but he told me to be sure not to mistake his meaning : he made me this promise without prejudice to his future action.

Thus were the Kruxes spared, and though a plot was set on foot for involving Mr. Krux in a game of Bridge and Mr. Sowerby in a game of Piquet at the same hour, so as to enable an earnest young man to get beside Miss Hope, yet nothing came of it, and the dragons were left to pursue their course of malevolent vigilance unchecked.

But an eye was upon them, and their downfall was assured. I witnessed it all. It was on the day when Mr. Burling discovered the contest between the whale and the thrasher. The alarm was sounded and, as I have already said, there was a rush of passengers to the port rail. In the excitement of the moment Mrs. Krux and Mr. Sowerby, one of whom was on each side of the girl, sprang from their seats and hurried to the bulwarks, forgetting in their eagerness the girl who had

been between them, or possibly taking it for granted that she was making for the same objective as themselves.

Before they had quite found out which was the whale and which was the thrasher—assuming that they saw either, which is going far—Major Wingfield, with the astounding promptness of a lame man, had seated himself in the place just vacated by Mr. Sowerby, and was telling Miss Hope that he felt he should ask her if she was any relation to Oswin Hope of the Ghourkas.

I saw how the girl became alert—with a touch of colour in her face—in a moment, as she said—

“He is my brother. I wondered if you were the Major Wingfield who went up with him to Chitral.”

“Oh, we went through the whole of that show together,” said the man. “Did he squeeze my name into one of his letters to you? I feel as if I had been mentioned in a *Gazette*.”

“You know what such a feeling is,” she said quickly. “I read what General French wrote about you in his despatch. I was greatly interested, knowing that Oswin knew you. I sent him out the newspaper with the full account of the fight. You got a horrid wound.”

“I got a brevet majority and a D.S.O.,” said he.

At this point Mrs. Krux rushed back from the bulwarks followed by Mr. Sowerby. They stared at the interloper and at the golden girl, but the two continued their conversation without the slightest show of abasement.

“Is it possible that you didn’t see the fight between the whale and the thrasher?” asked Mrs. Krux in a voice that was meant to command attention. She had seated herself beside the girl, Major Wingfield being on the other side.

"Oh, no," replied Miss Hope, resuming her conversation on the other side.

"It was most interesting: you may never see such a thing again!" said Mr. Sowerby sadly—he was standing—waiting for Wingfield to rise.

But Wingfield showed no disposition to rise. That morning Miss Hope and her guardians had not been seated on deck-chairs, which are proprietary, but on the skylight seats which all passengers paying cabin fare may occupy. Major Wingfield was now enjoying the one which Mr. Sowerby had recently occupied.

"I am glad that I missed that shocking sight," said the girl quietly. "I cannot bear a fight, especially between animals: it is so horribly cruel."

Then she turned once more to Major Wingfield, saying—

"Oh, yes, I sent out the paper to Oswin with the full account of your affair. I was so glad that those dreadful Boers did not get off scot-free after you were wounded."

"They certainly didn't: we managed to account for eighty of them," said he. "You see the Irishmen—the Munsters—came up with their bayonets. 'Don't stir, sorr,' a sergeant called out to me, 'we'll come back for you when we've finished them off!' I obeyed him: I did not stir, and they came back wiping their bayonets."

The girl's face was glowing—the face of the girl who abhorred fights.

"That was splendid!" she cried. "Poor Oswin felt very bitter that he had no chance of getting to South Africa."

"Oh, the Ghourkas are always at it," said he. "We of the gunners are compelled to take pot-luck."

"Don't you think that we had better go to our deck-chairs, my dear?" said Mrs. Krux, giving a very good example of the perpendicular style of architecture.

"I am quite comfortable here," said the girl. "Perhaps it is necessary for you to sit lower down, Major Wingfield?"

"I'm all right," said he. "I notice that Heber has appropriated my deck-chair in order to keep Mr. Jaffray abreast of the times in regard to Buller. It would be a pity to disturb him, wouldn't it? Are you going the round of the islands? So am I. We should have a fairly good time. You have a camera, of course? You'll find that you'll squeeze lots of fun out of it. Only a beginner? That's nothing. It's the same with photography as it is with other forms of gambling: fortune favours the neophyte. May I show you mine after lunch? I may be able to give you a hint—a low down sort of a hint, for I don't know too much about the business myself."

Miss Hope said that it was most kind of him. She would be delighted to have a lesson from him after lunch.

This amounted to the making of an appointment for after lunch: but it wanted an hour of lunch time, and this space was fully occupied by Major Wingfield and the sister of his old comrade. They had never met before—consequently they had a great deal to talk about—a great deal that did not seem in any way to concern either Mrs. Krux or Mr. Sowerby, but that seemed to concern very closely both Major Wingfield and Miss Hope, and, incidentally at least, three of their fellow-passengers, to say nothing of myself—though the matter was interesting only because I was a disinterested onlooker.

Within the sphere of my onlooking there loomed large and gloomy the face of the young man who had been meditating the annihilation of the Krux-Sowerby dynasty. I saw that his murderous intentions were still

in his heart, only their object had been changed.

He asked me what on earth people meant by undertaking the guardianship of a girl if they allowed every plausible fellow to push himself into the place which certainly should have been occupied by one of them.

And after lunch the golden girl was on deck once more, bearing her camera. The wily guardians had evidently held a council together to decide upon some plan of concerted action in view of what had occurred during the morning, and the result of their deliberations was shown by the arrival of Miss Hope on deck in the position of a prisoner between two guards, and with another walking behind. When she had seated herself—they marched her to the deck-chairs this time—Mrs. Krux was on one side and Mr. Krux on the other. Mr. Sowerby was within hail in case of need.

Never had Miss Hope shown herself to be on friendlier terms with her guardians. She had plainly meant to adopt the policy of the habitual criminal who gives no trouble to the police when captured. She chatted quite genially to Mrs. Krux while the latter did some fancy work.

And then Major Wingfield limped up followed by his man-servant carrying his camera.

The girl was on her feet in an instant.

"Do take my seat," she cried. "It is very bad for you to stand."

"Pray don't think of stirring," he said. "Philip, fetch my deck-chair and place it here," he added turning to his man.

"Very good, sir," said the man, hastening to where the deck-chair was sprawling.

But this deck-chair was rather an awkward one; it was of the invalid pattern, with a fixed support for a limb that had recently been shattered by a Boer bullet. The

fabric would not go within reasonable distance of Miss Hope's light deck-chair, and the Kruxes sat immovable as figure-heads on each side.

"I can manage it," said the girl.

And so she could ; for she gave her chair a jerk that brought it three feet in advance of the Kruxes' seats, and alongside Major Wingfield's. Another little jerk to square it, brought it so as to give Mr. Sowerby the best back view of it attainable, and then Miss Hope seated herself.

It took Major Wingfield two hours and ten minutes—the calculation was made by an independent authority—to explain thoroughly all the perfections of his Kodak.

And then it was very convenient—Miss Hope agreed with him that in an emergency the Kodak was a marvelously convenient machine. It could accomplish a great deal—more even than the book of instructions claimed for it.

But after all a ten-minutes' instruction with the instrument before one is worth a whole Encyclopædia of explanation.

CHAPTER VII.

By the end of the second day of our genial weather most of us were disposed to agree most cordially with Professor Dugdale's dictum that the earliest migrants in the human race had been fools. Under the awnings of the deck, with a sober consciousness of azure above them, we all became human and some of us became friendly. Miss Ormsby and I became friendly, possibly because I carefully refrained from touching upon the matter upon which I had (in a sort of way) promised her father to give her good advice—that is to say, such advice as was in accordance with his intentions.

I may remark that her father had never asked me what progress I was making in the task which he had set me—the simple task of turning away a girl's heart from the man on whom her affections are set. I fancy that from the first he thought me lukewarm in this particular matter. And if he did he was quite right. I was rather less than tepid in my desire to give unpalatable advice to a young woman with companionable eyes, especially when my sympathies were altogether on her side. Her father had made out a good *prima facie* case, so to speak, for his daughter. Everything that he had said upon the occasion of our first interview had tended to the accumulation of my sympathy for the girl; and I fancy that he suspected as

much ; and therefore he addressed him to a more promising person.

He and Mr. Jaffray became extremely intimate. They smoked side by side, they discussed trade in the Midlands, prospectively and retrospectively—a prospective view of business simply resolves itself into a question of the prospects of a prospectus—and it seemed as if Mr. Ormsby had found someone to whom he could open his heart with a better chance of obtaining sympathy than he had found his first essay aboard the *Avon* to afford him.

The consequence was that I found several opportunities of sitting by the side of Miss Ormsby, while her father and his new friend were at a distance. It appeared to me that the young man was rather shy. I was beside Miss Ormsby when her father brought him up to introduce him to her, and he certainly appeared nervous. He had all the fluency of the nervous man, chatting of inanities, while the girl sat before him with her head bent and her long lashes lying upon her cheeks which had become rose-tinted.

She had scarcely exchanged a word with him that time, though with me she had been chatty rather than silent as a rule ; so I was not surprised that Mr. Jaffray should show no great desire to force himself upon her. He seemed to be quite content to enjoy her father's society, and as the girl was never at a loss for someone to talk to, there was no ground for complaint in any direction.

It was when we were within a day's steaming of Barbados that I found myself beside Miss Ormsby on the deck. We had come up from tea together, and she said something to me about a book which I had lent her the day before. Still talking of it, we had strolled very far aft, and as some games were going on amidships, we

were left out of hearing of the few passengers who were to the lee of the deck-house.

I stood with my back to the bulwarks for a short time, and then seated myself in her father's deck-chair. I made a harmless remark regarding Miss Hope and the rout of the Guards Brigade—we had ceased to call them the dragons.

"Over-vigilance in parents and guardians is certain to be defeated in the end, Miss Ormsby," said I. "And its defeat obtains the widest sympathy. That is why *Romeo and Juliet*, and the Jessica scenes in *The Merchant of Venice* are so popular."

"I wonder if that is really so," she said thoughtfully. "And I also wonder if you have anything in particular on your mind which causes you to say this just now."

"Perhaps I had you in mind, Miss Ormsby," said I.

"Oh, then I know that my father has been talking to you about me," she said quickly, and with a flash of colour in her face.

"He did me that honour the first morning after leaving Southampton," I replied. "I felt that he meant to do me especial honour: his confidence implied a certainty that I was worthy of it, you see."

"He thought that he could get you to assure me that he was in the right and that I was in the wrong," said she.

"I am afraid that that is so."

"Then why did you not do what was expected of you? Why did you not begin to lecture me the first day you spoke to me?"

"Because I am going to do it now, Miss Ormsby."

"Oh, no: you are not. I know that my father was deceived in you: your heart was never in this work."

"My heart never entered into the question. It was your heart that was the subject of your father's confidence and of my consideration."

"Oh! He confided in you? I suppose you fancy that you know the whole story of my—my—he would call it foolishness?"

"A father is capable of anything. I am not capable of calling it foolishness."

"You say that although you have not heard my side of the story?"

"You would not expect to hear me say it after hearing your side?"

She looked at me straight in the face for some moments. Without taking her eyes off me, she said—

"Do you know I am getting to like you—rather."

"Couldn't you withdraw that 'rather'?" I asked.

"Yes, I like you, and I may have to get you to help me out of a difficulty some day. I foresee myself getting into a difficulty and I may want you to act in regard to my father as he wanted you to act in regard to myself."

"But you see, I betrayed the trust that he reposed in me. 'He has deceived her father and may thee!'"

"I am sure that you will be on my side when you hear my side of the story. My father acted most unreasonably—he has always acted unreasonably in regard to me. I did not mind that so long as his unreasonableness referred to the people whom I did not care about—the people to whom I was indifferent."

"That was natural. One can put up with a good deal of unreasonableness when it only affects other people."

"He had got it into his head that I was a great heiress—the only great heiress in the world—and that in consequence every man whom I chanced to meet would want to marry me."

"After all that wasn't so unreasonable."

"It was ridiculous to suppose that no one except an unscrupulous adventurer would want to marry me. But there's no use dwelling upon that, for whatever may

have been in the hearts of the men whom I met, I had no intention whatever of getting to care for any of them ; so I really didn't much mind being as carefully guarded as if I were a princess on whom the hopes of an empire depend. What I complain of is that when I chanced to meet in London with a man whom I really cared about and to whom no exception could possibly be taken, my father would not even allow his name to be mentioned ; assuming from the outset that he was actuated by unworthy motives in trying to get me to respond to—to——”

“To his protestations. I take it for granted that he protested something. It was against his protestations that your father protested.”

“It was—without seeing him—hearing him—making any enquiry about him—without even allowing his name to be mentioned : he does not know to this day what the man's name is. Now don't you think that I have good reason to call that unreasonable on his part ?”

“I am bound to say that I take your view of the matter, Miss Ormsby. I wonder what my views on this matter would be if I were your father. I think that it is very likely that I would be as unreasonable as he is—perhaps more so.”

“Surely you would at least have asked what was the name of the man ?”

“I am not so sure of that. Hearing the name represents the thin end of the wedge. I think that I would have had the sense to condemn the man without hearing his name.”

“Surely a daughter is entitled to be treated as a responsible human being.”

“But a daughter's lover has got no rights. He should be condemned unheard. The privilege of a trial by a jury of his peers is not for such as he.”

"I thought that your sympathy was——"

"So it is. Only—well, if I were the father of such a girl as you, I think I should resent most bitterly the approach of anyone who might threaten to deprive me of your society. When you come to think of it, the whole system of love and marriage is extremely hard upon the father and mother of the girl. Good heavens! A man slaves away half his life—all his life—in order that his daughter may be able to dress well and to be sufficiently educated, and just when she is in a position to repay him for all that he has done for her, by making his home beautiful, a perfect stranger lounges up, sings a song under her window, and then suggests that she should make his house beautiful for him, and leave her father's house desolate! I tell you, my dear young lady, one should not complain of the unreasonableness of a father until one has settled the question of the impudence of a lover."

"So you are pleading my father's case for him after all?"

"I am pleading the case of every father who has any affection for his daughter. Don't you really feel in your heart of hearts that you are treating your father very badly, Miss Ormsby?"

"I suppose—strictly speaking oh, it's too late talking that way now. It is useless looking back—the mischief has been—I mean till I was lucky enough to meet the only man who ever—oh, you are leading me on only to laugh at me. I don't like you now, not even rather."

"My dear child, if you fancy that I see anything to laugh at in the situation you are greatly mistaken. I think that the man—the only man who ever—is the luckiest in the world, and I hope that you may be the

luckiest girl in the world. Of course, your mother is on your side ?”

“How did you know that ? Why, my father does not know it.”

“That means that your mother is a very clever woman.”

“So she is. She never goes against my father in any matter ; and he believes that he always has his way in everything.”

“And he thinks so still—in this particular matter that concerns you all so closely ?”

Miss Ormsby laughed quite pleasantly.

“Yes, he actually thinks that this voyage will—bring me to his senses—I suppose that that is the phrase which he made use of to you in talking about it ?”

“He told me that he had great hopes of the voyage—that meant the same thing.”

“Poor papa ! He did not strike upon the idea of the voyage himself. It was mother who suggested it.”

“But you told me that she was on your side ?”

“That was just it. My father has great hopes of the voyage and so have I. Poor father ! He thought that he would never be able to prevail upon me to go with him on this voyage ; and he was quite surprised at my agreeing without a word.”

She paused and gave another little laugh.

That set me asking why she should have agreed without a protest to a long and unsatisfactory separation from “the only man.” I wondered was it because she thought that when her father found out at the end of the voyage that her heart remained unchanged, he would recognize the futility of holding out any longer against her heart’s desire ?

“I am sure that the long separation will only strengthen your affection,” I ventured to say. “If your

father should find out that this is so, I think that he might see his way to consent to give you his blessing and all the money that he can spare."

"That is just where I think you may be able to help us," said she. "At the end of the voyage—perhaps even before the end, an explanation will have to be made to father—a peculiar explanation. It may annoy him; but I think that, with a little talking to by you, he may be brought to—to—to look at everything in its proper light."

"I would not advise you to trust too much to me," said I. "You must remember that it is quite contrary to legal usage for the lawyer who has been briefed for the plaintiff to turn round and plead the defendant's case. I am afraid that your father would think it rather mean of me—perhaps he would refuse to hear me."

She smiled saying—

"Oh, in this particular case, I don't think that you need fear much in that way. But sufficient unto the day—you do not quite know all that there is to be known in regard to this voyage."

"I am beginning to feel that there are a few points on which I should like to be enlightened. One is, how it comes that your father, who has always done his best to surround you with a cordon to keep off the enemy, should have suddenly suffered his vigilance to relax? Of course, I do not say anything in regard to myself—mine are a sort of counsel's privileges, though I am afraid that I have not been over conscientious in the spirit in which I interpret them: but there are others—I saw him present Mr. Jaffray to you a few days ago."

Miss Ormsby laughed until her face was pink.

"He has become great friends with Mr. Jaffray," she said. "Mr. Jaffray is a barrister: perhaps my father had an idea that he should have a junior in the case

against—against—the defendant. I don't say that he was wrong."

"Now you are reproaching me for my perfidy to your father. Well, I don't say that I am beyond reproach in this respect. But the reproach should not come from you, that's certain."

"It is quite certain. I will not say a word against you—provided that everything turns out well."

"That will be very kind—and womanly of you, Miss Ormsby," said I.

Our conversation then dwindled out in mere inanities—sheer inanities; for before I could make an attempt to pull its head round, so to speak, young Gilbertson dodged round the deck-house to tell us that we were due at Barbados in the morning, and he hung about with the chirpy expression of one who has made a curious discovery and expects that his announcement of it will be received with acclamation.

Young Mr. Gilbertson had brought a very fine fur coat aboard with him—a fur coat and a collection of sixpenny novels belonging to the Dick Deadwood series, so popular with the greengrocer's staff. He had continued wearing the fur coat long after we had entered the Tropic. He hugged it to him with all the pertinacity of the original bear that had supplied a portion of the lining, at considerable personal sacrifice, and only when the temperature got up to 70° Fahrenheit did he relinquish it. Mr. Gilbertson knew the social value of a fur coat; and indeed so long as he wore it people treated him almost as an equal; but when he was compelled to lay it aside he did not seem to be the same man. He knew that this was so, and he had at once assumed a deprecatory style. He seemed for a day or two to be looking about for something for which he could apologize. He said "please" to the assistant steward.

His announcement to us that we were due at Barbados the next morning seemed to be the result of a bold attempt on his part to regain the position that he had lost. He undoubtedly felt that it was successful and that was why he was so chirpy.

Of course Professor Dugdale was able to tell us all about the origin of the effect of a fur coat. The wearing of the fur of wild animals testified originally to the prowess of the hunter; and (as he had told us several times before) the mighty hunter was the most highly respected of the tribe. The bestowal of admiration upon the wearer of these trophies of the chase became an instinct—instinct being simply the result of long custom—and the respect that, up to the present day, is given to the wearer of furs, even though he may be personally as insignificant as Mr. Gilbertson, is a survival of this same unreasoning instinct.

I think that we all felt greatly pleased at the chance of disrespecting Mr. Gilbertson, now that it was lucidly explained to us why we had been so silly as to respect him while the thermometer had been low. We made up our minds that we would always be on our guard in the future, lest we should be made to look foolish by yielding to the influence of an instinct that should never have survived the discovery of gold as a means of purchasing as much honour as the slaughter of half the jungle could command.

If I had not been thinking so much about Miss Ormsby and her love affairs I feel certain that I should have broken down under the weight of my reflection that we were parting company with Colonel Laurence. He was going on in the *Avon* to Venezuela, whereas we were to tranship for the Northern Islands.

I was very anxious to know what was taking him to Venezuela. I knew that, since the days of Sir Walter

Raleigh, Venezuela has been the land of splendid possibilities ; but what were its possibilities in regard to the lecture platform ?

Colonel Laurence gave me a hint as to his aims.

"It's about time that there was a revolution there," he said, "and in case it comes off before the President has raked together his million, he may be glad to know where he can look for a livelihood if he survives. I'm going to make him an offer anyway on behalf of the Bureau."

"Until your Emperor turns up you are going to give your clients a series of Presidents ? Well, I wish you luck," said I.

The next morning I was aroused early by the silence in the engine-room. The customary rattling of the stoker's shovels against the iron door of the furnaces had ceased. The propeller was at rest, and the absence of its vibrations made me feel quite lonely. I looked out of my port and saw at a distance of something under a mile the long low shore of Barbados.

CHAPTER VIII.

There was in this first glimpse of Barbados little to suggest the ideal island of coral and cocoanut. To one whose memory is stored with the literature of buccaneers, pirates, gentlemen adventurers, and Cromwell in Ireland, the aspect of Barbados as seen from the sea cannot be otherwise than disappointing. For years of my life the mention of the name Barbados was enough to bring before my eyes a picture of tropical luxuriance—cliffs crowned with palms, a jungle of brilliantly coloured flowers down to the water's edge, a stream trickling through the depths of a dark valley—a white coral strand with a lazy breaking wave. In the offing there was evermore swinging at anchor a schooner or two with raking masts and a brass swivel gun in the bows. The red caps of the crew of this craft gave the right note of tropical colour to the animated part of the scene. The same red caps sparkled in the sunlight that poured down upon the boat which was being rowed ashore, steered by a brawny, black-bearded desperado wearing a cutlass and a pistol or two of abnormal size thrust carelessly through a broad leather belt with an enormous brass buckle.

Barbados and Hispaniola and Jamaica—Port Royal, Port of Spain, Spanish Town, St. Kitts—these names, each and all of them, were to me as the little click from

the platform is to the man who works the magic lantern at the back of the hall : the mention of any one of them was sufficient to project a glowing picture before my eyes.

And here I was standing on the deck of a steamer looking across the grey-green water at the low coast of the Island of Barbados, the most commonplace picture that could be imagined. It might have been the Margate coast. It certainly was a good deal less tropical in its appearance than many of the villages of the Italian Riviera, Santa Margherita, Rapallo, or Chiavari, where the palms and lemon trees make a glorious show.

It took me some time to conjure up once more the picture which I had often seen during the previous year when "working up" the history of Cromwell in Ireland—before I succeeded in imagining myself to be on the deck of one of the fleet which was despatched with thousands of Irishmen, Irishwomen and children aboard "for the plantations of the Barbadoes." I had often pictured to myself that scene, but with a much more striking background than this coast—the poor wretches, who had survived the massacres of Drogheda and Wexford only to be shipped out to this strange place—there they lay in chains after a couple of months tossing between decks, waiting until the men wearing the broad-brimmed hats of fine white straw, came up the rail to carry them into the slavery of bond-servants on the plantations.

Alas ! I was able to see the scene very much more vividly when seated in the reading-room of the British Museum than I did now, when I was standing on the deck of a ship whose anchor might have been biting the sand within a yard or two of the spot where the anchor of one of those old, high-pooped ships may have been dropped.

But for that matter it is possible that the scene which I was trying to bring myself to imagine never did take place. The writers of historical novels are criticised by the indulgent reviewer in this fashion: "Of course no one looks for historical accuracy in such a work as that under notice, but the writer need not have set facts at defiance as he has done in almost every chapter."

Quite so, but the question is, What are historical facts? One historian who is widely trusted asserts that 40,000 souls were shipped from Carrickfergus for Barbados, a large fleet of English vessels being required for the job. But we find that another declares that only thirty deportations were made after the sack of Drogheda. An authority whose general accuracy was scarcely questioned, gave an account of the massacres at Drogheda, and the slaughter of the priests. But in one of his letters Cromwell challenges anyone to prove that there was any massacre whatever at Drogheda or elsewhere, carried out by his order.

This last statement is accepted by many people as such a settlement of the question as should satisfy the whole world. But who can say that Cromwell's challenge was not taken up, and that the charges brought against Cromwell were not proved to the hilt, only that the documents to this effect were destroyed by the order of the man whom they implicated? Was the Lord Protector the sort of man who would allow such a record to stand? I think he was not such a man. For two hundred and fifty years the tradition of the massacres of Drogheda and Wexford has survived in Ireland, the "curse of Cromwell" representing an extremity of objurgation that had its milder equivalent in Scotland at the time of the Black Douglas. Is there anyone who will say that the Black Douglas is white? But the Douglas tradition did not survive his century, whereas

the "curse of Cromwell" is in active use two hundred and fifty years after the events upon which it was founded. I find it impossible to believe that any man could be so execrated by a whole nation unless his deeds of cruelty among them were exceptionally revolting. Ireland was trampled on more than once by an English tyrant, but the people easily forgot it. That is what compels me to believe that Cromwell's massacres must have been exceptionally atrocious to arouse in a nation, to whom massacres were by no means strange, a feeling of undying detestation.

Again, one may ask what is an historical fact, when we are told that Cromwell came to Ireland to avenge the slaughter of the Protestant settlers in the North by the wild Irish. Now, it is stated by one writer that no fewer than 40,000 Protestants were barbarously slain in 1641-2, whereas another, writing only a few years later, affirms that less than 4,000 were slain. Now, when contemporary "history" can be so widely divergent in its records why should anyone cast upon the historical novelist the slur of gross inaccuracy. So far as I can judge, the majority of historical novelists have been far more careful of their facts than the professed historian. Certainly the most careless novelist when compared with Carlyle, that mouther of monstrosities—that shallowist of all critics—is a marvel of accuracy.

It does not seem to have occurred to any historian to suggest the possibility that some thousands of Irishmen may have gone out voluntarily to the West Indies after the taking of Drogheda and Wexford and the surrender of Cork. It is known that numbers went to Spain, to France, and in other directions of their own free will, when they perceived what the rule of Cromwell would be like. Why then may one not assume that they took shipping to Barbados?

Cromwell states distinctly that he shipped off a number to "the Barbadoes," but if he had not left that record few people would believe that, wherever he may have sent his prisoners, it was to this particular island; the fact being that the people of Barbados had taken steps to assert their loyalty to King Charles I., and it was extremely unlikely that he would make any move to oblige a community who had given him to understand that they looked on him as a regicide and usurper. The planters wanted nothing so badly as they did these bound servants, who were virtually slaves. It was not like Cromwell to become the benefactor of such people.

To be sure, it would be quite possible to assume that Cromwell's gift to the Barbadians of a gang of Irishmen was a grim attempt on his part to pay them the grudge that he owed them. He may have thought that he was making them a donation of hornets. His design may have been to chastise them for their stubbornness in refusing to recognize the Commonwealth. However this may be, it appears to me that if he had not left the record in black and white of having deported the survivors of the massacre at Drogheda to Barbados, it would have been open to anyone acquainted with the political situation at this island to affirm that it would be ridiculous to believe that he had ever sent an Irishman to swell the ranks of the people who would have nothing to do with him or his Parliament.

I have never seen any attempt made by an historian—a professional historian, not one of the slighted band of historical novelists—to account for the discrepancies in the recorded numbers of the emigrants from Ireland to Barbados, on the ground that some thousands of the inhabitants, seeing that their country was likely to be devastated by Cromwell and his army, crossed the

Atlantic on their own account. They may have had their aspirations of founding a colony professing their faith, in the West Indies, as the Pilgrims had founded their New England colony ; or they may have heard tales of the adventurous life—with large profits—which was led by a good many gallant fellows on the Spanish Main, and have thought that that sort of thing was rather better than starving among their bogs. The prospect of doing well for themselves and at the same time avenging themselves upon England by plundering her ships, could not but have appealed to the imagination of the Irish race, and one may be sure that the Lord Protector did not take any very energetic steps to prevent those who were anxious to leave Ireland from putting their design into execution.

And while I am thinking over the matter, looking across the blue water just as those thousands of other Irish exiles must have done two hundred and fifty years ago, a boat approaches us with a band of minstrels aboard playing “ Patrick’s Day ” with spirit and intelligence.

I need scarcely say that the sound of that melody banished whatever doubts may have remained in my mind on the question of the influence of Irish emigration on the West Indies.

The steamer was surrounded by a score of boats with diving boys, some of them no darker than the boys at Madeira and Malta, and certainly no more adroit either in the exercise of their profession or in the management of their boats, which by the way, are shaped like coffins ; but any old packing-case cut down and with the seams filled up with putty will do for a diving boat. It is not, I learned, *de rigueur* that it should be coffin shaped, but the boys are not superstitious in this direction, though they are negroes and brought up under the influence of the Salvation Army on one hand and the Obeah man on

the other. Their sympathies and the sympathies of nearly all the negro population of the Barbados, are seriously with the Obi, and incidentally with the Salvation Army. No self-respecting negro will begin the business of the day without arranging his charms and using antidotes against the effects of his (or her) enemy's charms. It requires one to possess an exhaustive acquaintance with the properties of a large number of things in daily use before one can sleep comfortably o' nights or idle comfortably during the day. The Obi has a long arm and he has a finger in every pumpkin pie, and his fingers are invariably unclean. The negro lives in an atmosphere of degraded superstition; and he is foolish enough to walk under a ladder, to look at the new moon through glass, and to sit down thirteen to table (when it is made worth his while). I have also heard that he will look with complacency at a single magpie; but I cannot believe that he would be so callous as to do this.

It was when I went ashore at Bridgetown that I made my first acquaintance with the negroes of the West Indies in the mass. Aboard the *Avon* all the deck hands—there are no sailors in the Service: all are deck hands—were negroes, and a few of the steward's assistants. But now I found myself plunged at once into the black gulf, and for two months I was perpetually struggling in its depths. I may find it convenient to give in this place in as few words as possible the result of my brief experience of the negro of the West Indies. So far as I had an opportunity of judging he is the least satisfactory of nature's handiwork. He seems to have no intelligence, and only that form of cunning which is an insult to the intelligence of the people against whom it is directed. He is a born liar and a contemptible coward. Malicious as a monkey, he has not the monkey's

humour. He is insolent, overbearing and cruel. He in no way resembles the genial coloured gentleman of the Carolina cotton fields, or the pleasant Krooboy of the West Coast of Africa. To compare him with the lordly Zulu, the Basuto or the common nondescript Kaffir that one comes across in Cape Colony would be ridiculous. The West Indian negro would be wiped out of Cape Colony in ten years. It is a great pity that he cannot be wiped out of the West Indies.

Of course this is mere generalization. I talked with several mulattos and quadroons who had worked themselves into positions of some importance, and found them intelligent and in possession of some sense of what was demanded of them when living among civilised people. I met in a few of the islands—St. Thomas and Tobago in particular—common negroes of obliging manners; but these exceptions only show one what the negro might be, and form a glaring contrast to what he actually is.

Aboard the *Amazon*, to which I transhipped to make the tour of the Northern Islands, all the steward's assistants were negroes, and a more disobliging, careless, and unintelligent crowd could not be imagined. They made the indifferent cooking seem doubly bad by their delivery of it. And here I may mention that for sixty-five consecutive mornings I had bacon and eggs for breakfast. There were possibly ten items on the breakfast menu, but after many futile and regrettable experiments I invariably fell back upon the bacon, even though it was dumped down in front of me, after I had given the steward the order for it three times.

"Bring me a cup of coffee, please," I asked of one steward.

"Cuppo coffy ? yessah," he responded, moving off. Then I called another.

"Just get me my coffee, will you ?"

"Coffy ? yessah," and off he would go.

"Coffee, and be quick about it, like a good chap," I said to a third.

"Coffy ? yessah."

In the course of five minutes or so the cup of coffee was generally brought to me by one of the three ; but I never got a cup of coffee or anything else if I asked for it once only.

But down the cup was placed in front of me, the saucer half full of liquid.

"Where's the sugar ?"

"Sugar, yessah."

Off the fellow would go ; and the moment that he disappeared I gave the order for sugar to a second and then to a third. Eventually it arrived—never through the agency of the first one whom I had sent for it.

Several times when I ordered something specific—a bottle of ginger-beer or a green-lime squash—I was told that neither was aboard the steamer. On going to the bar myself, I found that neither had been enquired for by the steward's assistant. But I may here say that the rascal might reasonably have taken it for granted that the deficiency existed ; for only for one week did I find the bar supplied with lemonade, and for days at a time there were neither limes nor lemons aboard the *Amazon*. For days we were without bananas, for days without oranges. The lemon squashes were compounded of certain acids, the effect of which was to discourage the use of the lemon squash as a thirst quencher.

But if I go on much longer in this strain I shall run the chance of being charged with having partaken too freely of the acid which did duty for the lemon. I will only say that I seemed to be the best satisfied of all the passengers aboard the four steamers whose cuisine I sampled in the course of my tour.

CHAPTER IX.

We went ashore in the launch, under a blazing sun, rounding a low but rugged point and entering the little estuary at Bridgetown, and steaming up a rather congested tidal way, just to the bridge itself. Some of the vessels moored along the quays appeared to be of two hundred or three hundred tons.

The business bustle of the town surprised me. Trams, drawn by mules, were flying in various directions, their rendezvous being the Square, in the centre of which is a statue of Nelson ; buggies, not all in a condition of abject dilapidation, obstructed the trams so far as was legitimate, and mules driven tandem in timber waggons obstructed both trams and buggies, and left a margin of obstruction for the inconveniencing of ordinary pedestrians. Black police wearing white helmets interfered as little as possible with the traffic, and not at all with the babble of the boatmen who swarmed about the bridge, or with the gabble of the girls—some of them well-shaped and neatly dressed—who tramped gracefully through the square carrying washing baskets and an occasional crate of fruit poised on their heads.

Business was being done in Bridgetown, so much was sure. It may not have been business of great importance, but it involved a deal of obstruction and a vast amount of shouting. The only lordly, leisured class are the

soldiers, and they are to be found by the dozen in the Square and in the High Street, the shoppy thoroughfare. In their gorgeous Zouave uniform, tall fezes, and white gaiters, they looked to an indulgent eye all that a soldier should be—insolent as to their expression, and disinclined to give way to a civilian, however civil, when on the foot-path. This is the proper martial spirit, and it has attained to a truly tropical growth at Barbados.

The general negro population in Bridgetown are so busy that they have no time to stand to converse ; they have their conversations all the same, however, and the way they manage it is peculiar. One woman sees an acquaintance in the distance and forthwith yells out some civility to her. The other responds, and they question and answer one another until they meet. They meet, but do not pause in their conversation or in their walk—on they go past one another, and continue yelling out their enquiries without turning their heads. They are only liable to turn the heads of the casual strangers to the town who have not been made aware of their manner of economizing time and space. But the soldier disdains to imitate the civility of these civilians. He swaggers along, a self-contained gentleman, smoking a cigarette, and you had better get out of his way.

Later in the day when driving round the Savannah, I had an excellent example of the spirit that has made the Barbadian Zouave what he is to-day. One of these soldiers was striding along wearing a very modern straw hat. A gust of wind carried it off ; but instead of making the fuss which every person whom I have ever known would make over such an accident, the fellow continued puffing at his cigarette, following quite unperturbed the hat which was tumbling along on its rim, until it reached a stone wall that resisted its impact.

And there it lay until the owner stalked up, regained it, and put it carelessly on his head.

The streets are of dazzling whiteness, and the chief one is kept liberally watered. It is more difficult to traverse than Bond Street at the height of the season, or one of those narrow lanes behind the square of St. Mark's at Venice, on a Sunday. Like both these thoroughfares it is a street of shops, the principal one being kept by a person with a Portuguese name, who occupies the proud position of the Whitely of Bridgetown. He is a man of weight, and I do not think that he errs on the side of underrating his own importance. His shops are really spacious, as are many others between the Square and the Bridgetown club-house, the building with the twin cupolas which form such conspicuous objects when seen from the anchorage.

I had made an appointment by telephone with a friend who occupies an important position on the island, and I was to meet him at the club-house. On my way thither—I had made a call upon another official in the meantime—I came upon Mr. Ormsby. He was waiting outside a large drapery establishment. The instant that he saw me he seemed to be struck by a sudden idea. I saw the effect of the impact upon his face.

"You are the very man I was looking for," he cried. "My daughter is in that shop with Mrs. Heber. They are choosing something that it requires two women to choose—that is all that I know about it, only that I had to give her ten pounds to go on with."

I said something which I meant to be sympathetic.

"That is not what I wanted to tell you," he cried. "I want you to do something for me—I want you to take lunch with us at an hotel that people are talking about—a beautiful drive, I am told—Hastings is the name of the place. My daughter will be with me of course, and Mr

Jaffray—he has promised to come. I am told that the flying-fish they give you is excellent. At any rate, it will make a pleasant change from the cooking aboard the *Avon*."

I told him that I thought it more than likely that the man whom I was to meet at the club would insist on my lunching with him.

"Oh, of course, in that case——" his face assumed an expression of despondency which I could not but interpret as extremely flattering to myself. Then he glanced round and laid his hand upon my arm, saying in a confidential way—

"You would be doing me a special favour if you could manage to lunch with me to-day. You would be doing me—all of us a good turn. The fact is—I told you all about my daughter. I think it quite likely that things may turn out all right yet."

"I am glad ; but I don't quite see——"

"You don't quite see what your coming to lunch with us has got to say to the matter—eh ? Come, and I'll explain it all to you as soon as we are alone. But if you give your mind to the matter, I think that you will see it all for yourself. Mr. Jaffray is one man in a thousand. You begin to see—eh ?"

"You think it's not impossible that Miss Ormsby——"

"H'sh. She may be coming out of the shop. They have been inside for more than half an hour. If she saw us talking together she might be frightened off."

"But Mr. Jaffray—has he any idea ?" I asked in a whisper.

"Not the remotest. But he has spoken to her once or twice, and he suggested that we should lunch together at that hotel. I believe that if he got a fair chance—on shore—aboard those blessed steamers with a crowd of

strangers—all ready to gossip—well, any young man might be a bit timid ; but on shore it is different. My wife is a very clever woman, I think I told you. Well, sir, her farewell words to me were these : ‘ Charles,’ she said, ‘ there’s no use in building a wall round our child any longer. We have done so too long already’—I don’t agree with her there, but let that pass—‘ she is bound to get married sooner or later ; the only thing that we can do is to do our best to see that she marries the right man.’ My wife said that, and I can assure you that it impressed me greatly—she is a very clever woman—cleverer even than some men. Now, I have been a good deal with this young Jaffray, and I have come to the conclusion that he is one man in a thousand. Of course I have said nothing to him about my designs—my hopes ; but—h’sh, here they come.”

Miss Ormsby, accompanied by Mrs. Heber and a negro porter carrying a good-sized pasteboard box, emerged from the store smiling.

“ They are really not quite uncivilized here,” said Mrs. Heber.

“ No place is that has tramcars and—pasteboard boxes,” said I.

“ He is coming to lunch with us at the hotel,” said Mr. Ormsby. “ He hasn’t quite promised, but he is going to.”

“ I hope so,” said Miss Ormsby. “ You said you had asked someone else, did you not, papa ?” she added.

“ No one particular—only that young Jaffray,” replied her father with studied negligence.

“ Oh, yes ; to be sure : I knew that there was someone else,” said the girl.

“ Well, with someone who is no one in particular,” said Mrs. Heber, “ and someone who is just the opposite,”—she smiled at me—“ you should have quite

a happy day. I wish I had not to go to the General's : I should enjoy watching your happiness."

We were standing by a hired landau by this time, and the pasteboard box was put in a safe place. Mrs. Heber and her young friend stepped in, and Mr. Ormsby sat facing them.

The girl cried "*au revoir*" and the vehicle drove off, leaving me to walk on to the club-house, filled with wonder at the innocent cunning of this elderly gentleman who had made a fortune by his own exertions in the Midlands. He had no sooner abandoned the theory which he had held for many years respecting the safeguarding of his daughter, than he had acquired another—one which was founded on a very different basis. No sooner had he become impressed with the discovery which his wife had made—namely, that their daughter would get married some day, than he had picked a husband for her—and this the first young man to whom he had spoken since he had listened to his wife's words of wisdom !

But as yet I could not exactly see where I came in, in respect of the promotion of his scheme. Why should I be asked to lunch with them because he had been innocent enough to fancy that his daughter would fall in love with the first man whom he permitted to address her ? Did he expect me to give his daughter some good advice ? Did he expect his daughter to take advice, good or bad, from me ? I thought that, having failed him once in this particular matter, he would give me up, and look out for another agent—indeed, I fancied that he had found such an agent in Mr. Jaffray, and I may have been right : perhaps he made advances to the young man on the basis of such an agency, and then conceived the idea of making him a principal in the transaction, not a mere agent.

At any rate, I felt myself bound to lunch at the hotel at Hastings, and I would have been stupid as well as ungrateful if I had considered the obligation in the light of a bore. Miss Ormsby was a delightful girl and she carried about with her a phosphorescence of romance which to me was very attractive. I was anxious to see how the little romance would end—assuming that the romance of love ends in marriage. Just at that moment it was “anybody’s game”—anybody’s except Mr. Jaffray’s. Whatever the girl would do she was not likely to throw over the man to whom her father so unreasonably objected, in favour of the one whom he submitted for her careful consideration.

I strolled on toward the cupolas of the club-house and on the way was offered by a gorgeously turbaned negress a tray of very over-ripe bananas at the rate of four a penny—just the price at which I had seen bananas that would be passed by a good inspector, offered on a costermonger’s barrow in the city of London in the autumn. I congratulated the lady upon the enterprise of her colony. Here was a simple little island in the Atlantic and yet it could successfully compete with the city of London in the retail trade in Barbadian bananas. The enterprise of the Japanese is so great that they can successfully compete with Birmingham in the manufacture of Japanese antiquities: and perhaps the day will come when one will be able to buy sugar in the West Indies as cheaply as in England.

It so happened, however, that among the cargo of the *Avon* which was being unloaded at Barbados, were some hundreds of sacks of sugar. Hearing this, I began to despair of the West Indies.

Bridgetown club occupies the topmost flat of a rather imposing building. Fine large rooms, delightfully airy and spotless, some of the windows affording a splendid

sea view, it can easily be believed that the place must be a boon to the jaded official or the worried planter.

On the day when I drank my first lime squash under its hospitable roof there was much to jade an official and to worry a planter. I learnt that the merchants who had hitherto been accustomed to advance money to the sugar growers in advance of the harvest, had issued a circular to the effect that in future those advances would be made only when the crops were ready to be cut. This meant absolute ruin to many of the planters who had not sufficient capital in hand to hold on until the harvest. In such a hand to mouth way has the sugar industry been pursued for years.

The prospect for the officials who are responsible for the peace of the island was a gloomy one, in the circumstances. It was pointed out to me by my official friend that, as soon as the thousands of negroes who were employed upon the sugar estates should be discharged, they would certainly do their best to get up a riot, and their efforts would be willingly seconded by the negroes in the towns, with the most appalling consequences.

In addition to all this the Government were sending some thousands of Boer prisoners out to the island, and it was assumed that if there was a riot of the negroes the strangers would surely join them and give them what the negroes have happily always lacked—a leader.

Knowing as I did by a residence in South Africa how the black races are regarded by the Boers, I was able to affirm in the strongest language at my command my belief—it amounted to a certainty—that in the case of a negro rising all that the authorities need do would be to put a rifle into the hands of every Boer prisoner and ask his help to restore order. Beyond a shadow of doubt, I said, every Boer would be on

the side of the Government in such an emergency.

I spoke so emphatically—and I think that I was justified in doing so—that the official may have had a ray of hope: but I do not flatter myself that he was altogether reassured. It was not to be expected that he should be so by the word of a stranger. As it happened, however, the accuracy of my judgment was not put to the test.

I learned that the authorities on the island are living in constant dread of an uprising of the negro population—one of those senseless, objectless insurrections which have taken place in some of the islands in the past and against which there is no protection.

The worst element in this dread of a rising is, I think, to be found in the certainty that whatever it may lead to it will bring disgrace upon the authorities. The high officials have ever before their eyes the case of Governor Eyre of Jamaica, whose prompt action averted the massacre of all the whites on the island, but who was recalled from his post in disgrace. They know that if they do not act with a strong hand when the uprising is in its earlier stages, it will sweep them away and unbridled savagery will do its worst.

“A little fire is quickly trodden out

Which, being suffered, rivers cannot quench.”

But they also know that if they take any strong measures they may incur the blame of the Home Government, who object to be worried in the House of Commons by endless questions with an innuendo in each, referring to “innocent bloodshed,” “massacring unarmed negroes” and kindred acts. The Opposition for the time being are invariably tender-hearted—full of indignation at any active step taken by an official for the protection of the white population. The moment that they change sides in

the House, however, that moment are their hearts hardened and they endeavour to show that blood was shed by the pint and not by the gallon. All the same they do not hesitate to sacrifice an official as a sop to their opponents, and of this fact the officials are fully aware.

If ever an uprising should take place in Barbados, it will be conducted on a large scale. A stranger landing for the first time on the island is amazed at the insolence of the black population. But they are the masters of the island and know it. Happily they have no ability to organize. If they were to get a leader at any critical moment they would turn the island into a jungle, and not a white man, woman or child would be alive inside a week.

Within the club many cocktails are being waved while the crisis is being considered, and many experiences are being exchanged. From all that I hear I am inclined to believe that the two canes which exist for the chastisement of the unhappy planters are the hurricane and the sugar-cane. I never heard so many bitter things said about the sugar-cane as I did in the smoking-room of the Bridgetown club. There was not a man in the room who did not seem to think that Columbus was a greatly overrated man. He it was who had brought the sugar-cane across the Atlantic. They seemed to think that they would have been happy this day if they had never heard of sugar. So the Irish peasant, after a bad year, would be ready to abuse Sir Walter Raleigh, the Columbus of the potato, if he had ever heard of him.

They were much more interesting when they began to talk of hurricanes. There was not one of these gentlemen who did not remember some of the noted visitations of this form of destruction. For an hour I listened to the curiosities of hurricanes. Some of the stories had

a touch of humour. Upon the occasion of the last visitation, a negro householder had hastily made a rope fast to the roof of his cabin and sent all the members of his family to haul away upon it to windward. He himself, however, being a pious man—especially in hurricane times—took to praying.

“Oh, Lor,’ we know that we’re all weak,” he said. “We know that nothin’ that we can do is of any use before Thee—if yo’ don’t keep haulin’ at that rope I’ll use it on yo’ backs, yo’ lazy bones,” he added to his family and then resumed his confession of impotence to the higher Power.

In Barbados, as in all other colonies which I have visited, I found that the people are very fond of telling stories against themselves; but I should not care to be the one who would say anything in their presence reflecting upon their importance. I think that one would get on much better with them by assuming that their colony is that which is dearest to the mother’s heart. Whatever old Mother England may think of her other possessions, the warmest corner of her heart is reserved for Barbados (or Jamaica, or Fiji, or Tristan d’Acunas, according to the company where one finds oneself).

A Barbadian gentleman laughed with the others in the room when he told the story of the cablegram that the inhabitants of the island sent to Great Britain on the eve of a serious war—

“Don’t fear to send your ultimatum; the inhabitants of Barbados are with you to a man!”

Of course the story is told of almost every other colony. The people of Melbourne tell it of the people of Sydney, and the people of Sydney tell it of the people of Melbourne. But the true spirit of Imperialism breathes through the message whether apocryphal or otherwise.

Every soldier should fight as if victory were dependent on his individual exertions. Every colony should regard itself as essential—as indeed it is—to the completeness of our family party.

CHAPTER [X.

I felt glad that I had promised (in a sort of way) to take lunch with Mr. Ormsby's party, for had I not been engaged I might have hurt the feelings of some of the gentlemen had I chosen to lunch with any one of them to the exclusion of the others. They were all extremely hospitable for paupers trembling on the verge of complete ruin ; and I have no doubt that had I been able to partake of the six lunches that were offered to me, I should have found that the planters of this island are careful to maintain the traditions of its brilliant past, in the face of many difficulties.

I was particularly anxious to hear something more of the settlement near Boiling Spring, which I was told was composed of the descendants of the prisoners whom Cromwell had sent out to Barbados after the sack of Drogheda and, later, after the battle of Worcester. I was advised not to trouble myself greatly about this romantic link with a period which has always interested me much. I found that these people are not regarded as the aristocracy of the island, and that they repay a careful avoidance.

On going into the reading-room I found Major Wingfield there. He hailed me, saying—

“ If you want to do a chap a really good turn you will lunch with me at Hastings.”

"I wish I could take ten lunches," said I. "I was told this morning that I should be doing a particularly good turn to someone if I lunched at Hastings with a certain party, and now you hold out a similar inducement to me. I can see how I should be doing myself a good turn by lunching at someone else's expense, but I really cannot see where my benevolence in the transaction comes in."

He gave a laugh but became solemn a moment later.

"You underrate your own attractiveness," said he.

"Of course I do—we all do," said I. "But I wish you would give me a hint—it may be useful to me in future—as to why my company is needed at that hotel to-day."

He became thoughtful for a few seconds. He was searching for some explanation, but was not very successful in finding one. Then I could see that as a last resource he was making up his mind to tell me the truth. Into such a corner people who are deficient in imagination are sometimes forced.

"My dear chap," said he, "you told me that you were very fond of animals of the cat kind."

"I am, but why my affection for feline——"

"So I thought that I would give you a chance of lunching with one to-day."

For a short time only was I puzzled. Then the truth dawned upon me. Wingfield had been adroit enough to arrange that he was to have lunch ashore with Miss Ethel Hope, but of course it would not have been possible to exclude Mrs. Krux from the party. Only on this hypothesis was his allusion to a cat intelligible. He was paying me a graceful compliment by thinking that Mrs. Krux and I should get on well enough together, while he and the girl might become better acquainted

with the contents of the tropical garden surrounding the hotel.

He perceived that I saw through his scheme of elaborate hospitality, and laughed.

"It's lucky for the nation that you were not on the side of the Boers," said I. "You should surely be accounted one of the greatest living strategists. Ask me to lunch another day and I'll jump at your offer like—shall I say, a cat?"

"It's a bargain," said he. "Where shall it be?"

"Say Prince's, to start with."

"Oh, hang it all——"

"Take my advice—don't ever count on the recurrence of any particular situation," said I. "Don't try to take a bond of Fate. Don't scheme for things to turn out to-morrow as they turn out to-day. Always make two bites of a cherry—the man who only made one bite suffers from appendicitis. Sufficient unto the day——"

"Is the moralizing thereof—take that to yourself. I'm really greatly obliged to you for your advice. Polonius was a fool to you. I feel sure that you would get on well with Mrs. Krux."

And really that was my belief too. I was sorry that I had allowed myself to be coerced by Mr. Ormsby.

I strolled back in the direction of the bridge and turned into the telegraph office to send a business cablegram. The moment I entered the building I found myself face to face with Mr. Sale, one of the three young men who had arranged with the purser to allow them to change their route.

"I'm so glad that I met you : I've been looking for you all the morning," said he.

I explained that I had come ashore by the first launch.

"I wanted to see you badly," he continued. "The fact is that—by the way, will you come and have lunch with me at the hotel at Hastings? I believe it's a first-class place, and I'll see that we get the best that they have."

I endeavoured to do justice to the regret that I felt at not being able to accept his kind invitation. I wondered what part did this young man intend me to play in his arrangements for the afternoon. I really felt quite embarrassed at the numerical strength of the people who had allotted to me the rôle of a Providence—a sort of pewter Providence—a useful thing for everyday wear, not particularly bright, not easily dinged, or if dinged, what did it matter?

"I'm sorry you can't come," said this Mr. Sale. "The fact is—anything like the cheek of that fellow Wingfield I never came across. The man who, because he happens to have sprained his ankle or something in the war, assumes that every woman cannot but look on him as a hero—a regular hero, mind, a second Baden-Powell—how he managed to get her to promise to lunch with him, I don't know. I had a nasty jar when I heard it. Of course the poor girl is not to blame—no, no; I wouldn't go so far as to blame her."

"That's your generosity," said I.

"No, no: all I ask for is fair play and—well, it occurred to me when I heard it that it would be a good joke if you were to lunch with me at a table near them, and later on you might get Wingfield to talk to you, and while you were keeping him by you, I might get Miss Hope to stroll round the garden with me. I've never had my chance yet. The way those old fools never let her out of their sight—except just when they should have kept all their eyes open—well, I know what you think of it. All I ask is fair play."

I said a few sympathetic words and hurried off to write out my cable.

When so engaged I heard a voice to which I had become accustomed, saying in a tone whose airy confidence compelled mistrust—

“I give you my word that he was a very ill-used man—the bravest soldier in the British army—never knew what fear was. I served under him, so I should know.”

Major Heber was doing his best to convince a telegraph official of the purity of Sir Redvers Buller’s cause.

I thought that the best thing that I could do would be to get into a buggy at once. Any further delay might only involve me in more humiliating invitations to lunch. I never before felt that my position in life was that of the handy man—the man who is certain to accept an invitation to a dinner party if one of the guests is suddenly unable to fulfil his engagement—a sort of fourteenth man who may be engaged at the confectioner’s in Paris at a moment’s notice in case of thirteen sitting down to table.

But before I reached the buggy-stand close to the bridge I encountered Miss Crofton and her father. Miss Crofton was the good-humoured young woman who was no longer young, but who was certainly content to be any age that it might please time to make her.

“Come and lunch with us at the hotel at Hastings,” said Miss Crofton. “I have brought my bathing things ashore. I am told that there is a lovely beach.”

“Do lunch with us,” said her father. “We may be able to get something satisfactory at last.”

I did not cry “Another !” the fact being that I recognized the unique character of this invitation—the only one offered to me on my own merits—the only one impelled by a spirit of hospitality.

“Alas !” I said ; “I have already been coerced by

the kindness of Mr. Ormsby into a promise to lunch with him. I wish that I was going with you."

"Well, you can at least come with us," said Miss Crofton. "We have chartered a tame landau—I suppose this is the one—" a landau crawled by making an amount of obstruction quite out of all proportion to the spirit of the horse in the shafts.

I got into the vehicle and we drove round the corner to the post-office. When passing a coiffeur's—perhaps I should say *the* coiffeur's, for there seemed to be only one white man's hair cutter in the place—I saw three of the *Avon's* passengers seated on the balcony waiting their "turn." Young Gilbertson of the fur coat was one of them. He sprang up and leant over the rail of the balcony waving his arm to attract my attention. Our driver slackened his pace, and a team of mules nearly ran into us.

"I've been looking for you everywhere: will you lunch with me at Hastings?" yelled the young man.

I am afraid that he thought that he had made an extremely good joke; but even at the risk of conveying such an impression to him I could not refrain from laughing loud and long, before I shouted back my regret at being already engaged. I do not think that he was convinced of my sincerity; but he appeared to be quite satisfied that he had made a joke of the first water, and what was stranger still, so did the two others who were beside him on the balcony. They laughed even more heartily than he did.

We had a delightful drive. It gave us an opportunity of seeing how large was the town, and how spacious were some of its buildings. No one coming for the first time to the West Indies can fail to be struck with the spaciousness of everything, except, perhaps, the streets. In some of the towns there are warehouses and stores

and churches that would be creditable to any city in the world, where prosperity in business goes hand in hand with religious enterprise.

One quickly perceives that all of these buildings were originally erected when the trade and prospects of the islands were very different from what they are to-day. To be a West Indian a hundred and fifty years ago was to have a better chance of getting within the sphere of the dreams of avarice than being a nabob at the time when Clive was astonished at his own moderation. It is only when one sees these spacious buildings that one becomes aware in some measure of what it meant to be "in sugar" at a time when people no more associated gout with sugar than they did gout with port wine, but took plenty of both, leaving their children a pretty fair amount of cash to spend on specialists. Trade must have been immense to have required such warehouses; but as regards the churches I am not quite certain that it would be quite fair to the old colonists to judge of their religious necessities on the same analogy.

On the outskirts of the town we came into the negro quarter. Here were wooden structures of the "shanty" style of architecture by the score—lines and lines of houses all pure "shanty" or Ashanti, and at every door a negress with a flaming turban and half-a-dozen children tumbling and rolling and swarming in the sunshine, very economically draped. To those who were best capable of judging on the subject, they all seemed to stand in need of the most strident rebuke, and I think that nearly all of them received it. It was very strident, but as they invariably answered back, perhaps they did not feel so mortified as a stranger might imagine they should have done.

Somehow, although it was years since I had lived in the midst of a black population, the specimens with which I felt myself now surrounded did not seem strange

to me. I seemed quite at home among them. I made a remark to this effect to Miss Crofton, and she laughed, saying—

“Why, so do I. You see I have a fad for collecting old carved oak.”

I was not sorry when a turn in the road brought us clear of the native quarter. The truth is that children as well as adults of the negro race appeal rather too forcibly to another sense than that of sight. I used to think that a Zulu, a Malay and a Boer sitting together, constituted a *bouquet d’Afrique* of the strongest possible pungency, but it was as nothing compared to the nosegays of these little wayside flowers that just missed being run over by every vehicle that passed.

But now we were in a broad and well-kept road, bordered by villas, each with a large garden affording us glimpses of some magnificent tropical growths. The gardens certainly require to be large to accommodate such profusion. Here were cactuses, some of them quite thirty feet in height, and hundreds of aloes; but what gave the effect of a perfect blaze of colour was the crotons. Looking over the vast profusion of these we felt that we were gazing into the very heart of the tropics. I expected to see much more of the hibiscus than was here, but all we saw were magnificent specimens. Miss Crofton recognized the *lignum vitæ* here and there, its magnificent blue blossoms mingling with those of the frangipani, only the latter were red and white. Hundreds of other flowering shrubs were on both sides of the road and, of course, cabbage palms and cocoa palms by the thousand. Wherever there was a space among the flowers or the shrubs into which it could thrust itself, a palm of some sort had taken root. We seemed to be driving through an endless Kew palm-house, but, as usual, most of these

trees were denuded and shabby—they wanted more attention to be given to them. I daresay that from five hundred to six hundred gardeners who understood their business as well as those do at Kew would, by working ten hours a day and a liberal use of the hose—a mile or so of hose—overcome the shabbiness of the palms.

Another turn and a short climb brought us out upon the Savannah. The name has a certain flavour of romance about it. In all the old pirate stories the Savannah plays an important part. But what is it in reality? Well, if Clapham Common were in a West Indian island it would be called a Savannah. On this island it is a fine space of tawny grass, irregularly surrounded by barracks. Our driver told us that the trees of which we saw traces in all directions had at one time so completely surrounded the Savannah as to make a shady walk; they had, however, all fallen victims to the terrific hurricane of September, 1898. From the Savannah we got upon the tramcar road, with villas of the best class we had yet seen, their gardens sloping down to one of the finest beaches possible to imagine.

About a quarter of a mile from the terminus of the tramcar stands the hotel which, so far as I could gather, was the objective of nearly all our fellow-passengers, and where I had a chance offered to me of eating five different lunches. It looked quite equal to all the demands that might be put upon it by even the most voracious of Royal Mail passengers.

Its walls had not the half-caste appearance of so many of the lath and plaster buildings of Bridgetown; it looked genuine, inspiring faith in the splendid possibilities of its lunches.

On the spacious verandahs there was such a muster of *Avon* passengers as prevented our feeling lonely. As

I paused at the entrance to have a few words with a little monkey on its own doorstep, I heard the click of a Kodak and later on I found that I had been snapshotted by my own camera, which I had sent up to the hotel. Happily there was a background of the bamboo plantation to give the picture some value.

On the verandah were all the faces that I knew. It seemed ages since I had seen them ; and I had certainly never seen them so wreathed in smiles. They were the faces of released prisoners—all except Mr. Aytoun. Whatever his feelings were, Mr. Aytoun's face never betrayed him. He had discovered a new cocktail made with Old Highland Malt. It was eminently satisfactory, he said ; and it added immeasurably to one's capacity to enjoy the luxuriant vegetation of the tropical island. He asked me what was my private opinion of the poet Burns.

Major Wingfield was on the verandah—he was leaning over the rail with Miss Hope by his side. He was pointing out to her a humming-bird which was hovering about the white blossoms of a flowering shrub growing some twenty or thirty feet high—*Cordelia*, someone said its name was. In order to point out the bird to her properly he had to lay his hand upon her arm. Everyone knows the aid to sight that is afforded by the pressure of a friendly hand. Having brought such pressure to bear upon her, she at last saw the charming thing. We all saw dozens of them darting with the quick movement of dragon flies, their wings quivering so rapidly that they seemed to be motionless, about the other flowering shrubs ; but one only seemed to keep the attention of Wingfield and the sweet girl by his side. Their heads were very close together now, and I thought it likely that he was discovering a resemblance between the blue of the humming-bird and the colour of her eyes. At any rate

he was in the best possible position for making a comparison between the two.

Then it was that Mr. Sowerby marched Mr. and Mrs. Krux across the verandah to see the humming-bird. He insisted in their taking an interest in the ornithology of the island. But Major Wingfield had brought his knowledge of strategy to bear upon the situation of the moment. He had, I saw with great interest, placed the girl at the extreme end of the verandah, with a small table behind her. It was thus impossible for an attacking force to get beside her by a flank movement. Mr. Sowerby was no tactician. It never occurred to him to do more than run Mrs. Krux by the side of Major Wingfield. But Major Wingfield did not mind this at all. He talked very agreeably to Mrs. Krux, doubtless upon the habits of the humming-bird, but he never neglected the younger lady on his other side. And this younger lady never allowed her shapely little head to be turned by all the ornithological lore with which Major Wingfield had filled it. But she was clearly desirous of acquiring all the knowledge possible to be gained on the subject, for she turned to Mr. Sowerby, who was behind the table which was behind her, and with her face overflowing with interest, entreated of him to go round to the other side of the verandah in order to find out if any humming-birds were there.

Mr. Sowerby crawled off.

Just round the corner of the verandah my host was seated between his daughter and Mr. Jaffray. The strategical value of such a position—between the two people whom he wanted to bring together—was not immediately apparent. The young man was turning over the pages of a sort of guide-book. The young woman was gazing with uninterested eyes over the dazzling white roads to the windmill, which seemed to

stretch a succession of friendly arms out to the wanderers waving their thoughts back to home.

Mr. Ormsby jumped up when I appeared. So did Mr. Jaffray, but the latter only for a moment. He quickly seated himself again, and of course he was now compelled to go an inch or two nearer to the girl. He ventured to point out the exquisite glimpse of the sea which was obtainable beyond the white beach. She acquiesced languidly in whatever opinion he had expressed. It did not interest her. This pair clearly required some bringing together.

"It was so good of you to come," said Mr. Ormsby. "I hoped you would see your way to it. I said to myself: after being accustomed to so much society in the saloon of the steamer he will find it lonely lunching by himself."

"I had indeed a narrow escape of a lonely lunch, Mr. Ormsby," said I. "Only for your thoughtfulness——"

"Don't say a word about that please. You see——" his voice fell to a whisper, and he gave the least little twitch of an eyelash in the direction of the young people—"you see, they have come together already. Don't you think that we might take a stroll round to the verandah? What's that I hear about humming-birds? I'm sure I should think the money well spent on the whole voyage if only I could see a humming-bird in its native state."

He had raised his voice in saying this so that his daughter might hear every word and understand that only under extreme pressure was he leaving her. He put his arm on mine and gave the idea of dragging me round the verandah. I began to think that this lunch would be a hard-earned meal.

"My dear sir," he whispered, when we had turned the corner of the house, "don't you think me such an

ass as to want to see a humming-bird and that. You perceive, don't you, that I only made this an excuse to leave the young people together? Myra hasn't quite thawed yet, but I don't think that she really objects to him so strongly as she did. I have great hopes. Oh! are those the humming-birds? I smell fish cooking! I hear that they are great on flying-fish here. I had no idea that they ate them. I suppose that the flavour must be a cross between a pheasant and a fish. Will you take a sherry and bitters before lunch? I'm going to have one myself."

We turned in by a door, half-way along the verandah, and found ourselves in a delightfully cool room—a sort of lounge where people might have tea or cocktails at one of the small tables. But the only occupants of the place at that moment were our officer of Dragoons and his mother. They were playing Patience with dwarf cards while waiting for lunch.

There was a sort of bar off this room, and from it came the perfume of cigarettes and the clink of glasses. While we were in the act of passing through for our sherry and bitters, we heard a voice in the distance. This was what it said—

"My dear sir, you have been reading some of those confounded papers. They have put you astray. Take my word for it, Buller is a very ill-used man. He made an ass of himself to be sure, but I served under him. I should know."

"I thought that the Hebers were lunching with the General," said I to Mr. Ormsby.

"Oh, no," said he, "not both of them—only Mrs. Heber."

"That's rather a pity," said I; "perhaps the General may never know how ill-used a man Buller was."

When, after a decent interval, we returned to Miss

Ormsby, we found her sitting with Miss Crofton, while Mr. Jaffray was talking to Miss Crofton's father.

My companion seemed disappointed.

"Why couldn't these people have stayed away for awhile?" he said. "I'm sure that Myra was beginning to thaw. Do you think that we might send the pair of them away to look for a humming-bird?"

Before I had fully considered the question the luncheon bell rang.

In justice to myself I must say that I did my best for my host. I did my best to earn my lunch. He seemed to think that we should have altogether ignored the presence of his daughter and his other guest, but this I found impracticable. Even to oblige the gentleman whose thoughtful hospitality had saved me from eating a lonely lunch, I could not but reply to any question that his daughter asked me, and she asked me a good many. Mr. Jaffray, however, got plenty of chances, and I thought that he showed a disposition to make use of some of them. He seemed to pull himself together, so to speak, and I fancied that he was even on the verge of becoming interesting to the young woman. He was, undoubtedly, a very nice and an extremely well-informed man, without the slightest suspicion of the cock-sure manner of the junior counsel; but I had no hope for the success of Mr. Ormsby's experiment, though I did not consider myself bound to express this opinion to him when we were smoking our cigars together after lunch.

The only excitement of the day was caused by Mr. Burling's announcement that, driving round the coast, he had suddenly come upon an enormous school of land tortoises, making their way to the hills as fast as a man could walk. He explained to us, while communicating several most interesting and original facts of natural

history, that the popular notion that a tortoise was extremely leisurely in its movements had long ago been exploded. He himself had once kept a pet tortoise, and when they went out for walks together it was as much as he could do to keep up with it.

Some of the less receptive of the men who were smoking on the verandah looked at one another as if they felt that this tortoise was not the only individual that it was difficult to keep up with.

After drinking our coffee some of our party strolled off to the beach. For my own part I felt as if I could never get too much of that beach. Standing upon it watching the rise and long roll of every wave—those waves were surely the hexameters of the living poem of the sea—hearing the whisper and sigh and the thunderous laughter of waters, I seemed to recall all the books which had made an impression on me from "*Robinson Crusoe*" to "*Treasure Island*." What thin invertebrate things are all novels compared to those stories of sea adventure with the swish of the ship's cutlasses on every page, the singing of pistol bullets, the pungent smell of powder, and all heard or seen against such a background of green sea!

Here on the beach at Barbados, with a row of languidly waving palms behind me and the long wave tumbling at my feet and then uncurling itself like a mighty scroll in the far distance of the shallowing shore, I felt that I could understand something of the impulses that stirred all the great hearts of men whose names ring through the history of the little island of Barbados, and the other specks on the map of the Spanish Main. Pirates and robbers, most of them, from Columbus to Drake and Raleigh, and nearly all cruel men of evil passions. But such men! Makers of history, unconscious wielders of those forces by which worlds are made! These

fellows were not merely the wielders of the forces of Nature ; they were the actual forces of Nature itself. That is where they were great, and that is how it comes that even those of us who go delicately, feel an overpowering admiration for them.

It was the sound of this sea that was in their ears ; it was this line of palms that was before their eyes. Nothing about them could have been squalid. We do not stop to reflect that they must have fed like beasts, that they must have lived like beasts—that in fact, they were beasts without the cleanness of the beast ; all the thoughts about them that come to us have a clean wind blowing through them, and are mingled with the scent of the green sea.

And behind us is that ridge of palm trees.

CHAPTER XI.

The steamer in which we were to complete the cruise round the islands was of barely half the tonnage of the *Avon*. Its alias was the *Amazon*—I regret that I am unable to say what its original name was. The ship was quite enough for the work of conveying leisurely tourists through this quiet archipelago. We were to go northward as far as the Danish island of St. Thomas; after remaining there for some days our programme was to pay a return visit to all the islands, and then go southward to Trinidad and La Guayra, the port of Caracas in Venezuela. Thence we were to come for the third time to Barbados, and tranship for any other port mentioned in the programme. I may here mention that this programme was carried out with the most admirable punctuality. No steamer was an hour late in arriving at any island, and the worst *contretemps* that we met was the failure of green limes in the pantry for three days.

This is a rather disappointing statement to have to make. Most people refuse to read an account of anything except a *contretemps*. And certainly a *contretemps* is something on which one looks back with pleasure; but while it is in operation one is inclined to prefer something less emotional.

We missed a good many of our old friends from the

saloon of the new steamer. Some had been passengers only as far as Barbados ; others were going on in the *Avon* to South America, or transshipping for Jamaica. But we had picked up several who were going northward with us. Among them was an archbishop (colonial), but we were to be deprived of his society at the first port, St. Lucia, so that we should barely have time for an archiepiscopal benediction ; but we hoped to find consolation for this in the reflection that a gentleman had come aboard with a box of dissolving views to illustrate a lecture, which he proposed giving at some of the islands, on the Temple of Solomon. I understood him to attribute the present unsatisfactory state of the West Indies to the ignorance in which the inhabitants were living on this subject. How was it possible for a community to maintain its place in any scheme of civilization so long as it showed an indifference to the proportions and symbolic features of the Temple of Solomon ? In the true spirit of missionary enterprise he had set out to give the West Indies a chance, so to speak. If, after his visit to the islands with his magic lantern and box of dissolving views, the people chose to remain in ignorance, that was their own look-out. He, at any rate, would be free from all blame.

His name was Fraser, and he was a nice, civil-spoken gentleman of sixty. He offered to give me a dress rehearsal of his spirited entertainment, so that I might be able to judge for myself whether or not the people of Bridgetown were justified in the arctic coldness with which they had received him on their platforms. But, while appreciating his courtesy to the full, I did not think it advisable to put him to so much trouble for the sake of achieving so insignificant a result. I acted in the spirit of the schoolboy who, when his master offered to prove to him that the square described upon the

hypotenuse of a rectangular parallelogram is equal to double the rectangle described upon the other two sides, begged him to spare himself the trouble as he admitted the statement. I assured Mr. Fraser that I had never had any doubts in my mind as to the callousness of the Barbadians, and even though he told me that the rehearsal which he proposed would not occupy more than three hours, I maintained my attitude with firmness.

I noticed him putting himself on a friendly footing with everyone on the deck.

He put himself on a very friendly footing with Mr. Burling. Overhearing Mr. Aytoun remark to Jaffray—

“That was a pretty fair story that de Rougemont told us to-day about the land-crabs,” he said,

“I beg your pardon. Did I understand you to say that de Rougemont was aboard the steamer?”

“Of course, he came out with us,” replied the Scot. “There he is leaning over the rail.”

Before Aytoun remembered that Mr. Fraser had not been among the old passengers and that, consequently, he could not have known what was the pet name aboard the *Avon* for Mr. Burling, the genial Mr. Fraser went across the deck and, taking off his hat in the most courteous manner possible, said—

“Mr. de Rougemont, it gives me great pleasure to make your acquaintance, sir. I hope we may have many a chat together. You know who I am.”

“I don’t know who you are, but I know what you are,” said Mr. Burling, turning on his heel and walking aft, leaving the kindly spoken gentleman aghast.

I suppose that kindly spoken people in their efforts to be courteous now and again get nasty falls.

But before the steamer was under weigh Mr. Fraser had recovered from the effect of this unaccountable rebuff,

for I heard him explain in the most lucid way to the archbishop his theory regarding the death of Mary Queen of Scots. He held that Mary Queen of Scots had died from blood poisoning.

I venture to think that his Grace was glad rather than sorry that the steamer was to arrive at St. Lucia early in the morning. I overheard Major Heber talking to him a few minutes before, and, whatever the topic may have been upon which they were conversing, it necessitated the assertion that someone—I quite failed to catch the name—was a very ill-used man.

Major Heber was in an extremely assertive mood this evening. We should never have guessed how it had originated had he not confessed to us in a whisper of great confidence, that he had just had his fourteenth cocktail and that he was afraid something had been wrong with the last.

I thought for one that his fears in this matter were not wholly groundless.

A few months before, I saw when in Ireland, a letter which a minor official had written to the head of the department, endeavouring to exculpate himself from a charge of intoxication.

“The truth is, sir,” the letter ran, “that I was so hard worked all the day I had not a moment left to eat anything. Unfortunately, in the evening I had a single glass of whiskey, and it *leant up against me.*”

I fear that the fourteenth cocktail had “leant up against” Major Heber.

He kept out of the way of his wife.

Mrs. Heber had “taken up” Miss Croysdale, the young woman who had brought her maid with her and had taken an entire cabin for herself and her attendant and a lorry load of trunks. She was a good-looking girl, somewhat reserved; and of course it was under-

stood that she was extremely well off to travel in the way she had adopted. She did not seem to have told anyone aboard much about herself and her family, but Mrs. Heber's pleasant adroitness was equal to the task of discovering that Miss Croysdale was an orphan, and that she had neither brothers nor sisters—only trunks; a fact which Mrs. Heber assured me was a very pleasant one to reflect upon when there was any question of division of property. It was the same lady who alluded every now and again to Miss Croysdale as "the heiress." It was probably the reiteration of this word—one of the pleasantest in the language—that caused Mrs. Heber to "take up" Miss Croysdale.

The incident concerned us, owing to Mrs. Heber's having brought her to our table on the *Amazon*. One seat still remained vacant, and it was taken by a man named Conrad. A young fellow of excellent manners and with the reputation of having one year been placed among the first-class cricket averages. The business which had brought him out to the West Indies was to see a cricket match at Trinidad. He had transacted his arduous task with great credit to himself, being probably the most intelligent spectator on the field, but having still some time to spare before the opening of the home season, he had made up his mind to see all the islands. That was how he came to join us at Barbados. It was Mrs. Heber who arranged with the steward that Mr. Conrad was to sit beside Miss Croysdale, which suggested that Mr. Conrad had also been "taken up" by Mrs. Heber.

(His position by the side of Miss Croysdale placed him exactly opposite to Mrs. Heber.)

Among the tourists who would never have been missed had they disembarked at our first port, was a certain Mrs. Baker and her daughter, who gave them-

selves more airs than the largest-sized, twin-screw electric ventilator could supply when working at the highest pressure. But as it turned out, they had every reason to assume this superiority to the rest of us, for they were in the brewery business, and Miss Baker had once appeared by accident in the same picture as a minor Royalty, in a cinematograph. She had been well to the front in the crowd, and her face had just managed to be clear of the policeman's arm, but it *was* clear of it, and its blurred smile had been recognized by all her relations who had attended the music hall while that cinematograph was doing its turn for one week.

Mrs. Baker made me acquainted with these important biographical data in an outburst of patronizing confidence one day, and had afterwards ignored my existence, which should make me say kind things about her now, even though I had no other reason for doing so.

She always alluded to her daughter as Miss Baker ; probably for the same reason that was given by Adam for calling the fox a fox—because it was a fox. She called Miss Baker Miss Baker because she was Miss Baker.

Only it sounded queer coming from her mother.

“Miss Baker is so young !” she told me on this red-letter day of my life when I had a conversation with her. “She is so young and so unconscious of her own beauty !”

I did not venture to suggest that she shared this unconsciousness with all her fellow-passengers.

Miss Baker dressed so extravagantly as to be really discourteous to the rest of her sex aboard. She seemed to be making the cruise for the sake of displaying her frocks. She not only displayed *them* but her own lack of taste as well, Mrs. Heber assured me, but I did not mind her criticism ; I judged for myself and left off with

a sincere respect for Mrs. Baker's extravagance. I thought it quite delightful to be brought face to face with an Ascot toilet in mid-Atlantic in the morning, and with a Carlton creation at dinner.

The only person aboard with whom Mrs. Baker and Miss Baker became really intimate was a good-looking young fellow named Carter. He was the politest person I ever met. One might have fancied that he hoped to gain something by his politeness beyond the consciousness of doing the right thing. At any rate, like most polite people, he had few friends, but among the few were Mrs. Baker and Miss Baker. This fact somehow prejudiced people against him, and they said that he was going to Trinidad to become assistant secretary to the Governor-General. He did not confide in anyone what post, if any, he was going out to fill in the entourage of his Excellency.

But he undoubtedly was a *persona grata* with Mrs. Baker and Miss Baker. The former assured me that he was a most superior gentleman, and when I protested that she was rather hard on him, she went on to say that he was very different from the majority of the passengers. For her part, she said, she wondered where some of the others had come from, and also how anyone could call Miss Hope good-looking ; for she had worn the same dress every day since leaving Southampton.

Mr. Carter bowed his way through the Tropic of Cancer and when the evenings became warm he sat beside Miss Baker, who wore a pale pink opera cloak, on his deck-chair, at a disrespectful distance from the chairs of the other people ; and sometimes Mrs. Baker would find that the night air was too chill for her, or too warm or something, and go down to her cabin telling Miss Baker not to stay on deck too long.

Miss Baker was friendly, but she was not indiscreet.

She allowed Mr. Carter to bow her down the companion at four bells—when few of the passengers had retired. They all admitted that it was difficult to say at a moment's notice which of her three opera wraps was the prettiest.

Some people aboard rather hoped that the Bakers would tranship for Trinidad with Mr. Carter at Barbados; but though he was compelled to do so, they came on with us. Mrs. Heber's theory was that they had heard that the Archbishop was to be aboard the *Amazon*, and they felt that it was necessary for someone who had been cinematographed with the Prince, to do the honours of the saloon for his Grace. However this may be, I saw Mrs. Baker talking to his Grace for close upon four minutes in the companion, and I also noticed his Grace circumspectly avoiding her for the rest of the evening.

I ventured to say something about Mr. Jaffray to Miss Ormsby that evening while the steamer was still in sight of Barbados, mentioning that I thought he was a very well-informed man, and certain to make a name for himself at the Bar, he possessed so few characteristics of the ordinary barrister, especially as regarded the amount of his information. For a single second her face brightened, so that I fancied she might actually be interested in the man; but then she gave a little imitation of an Englishwoman's copy of a Frenchwoman's shrug, and said—

"I suppose he is well-informed: he talks to father on the municipalization of the Midlands, and to you on—is it the beauties of Brehon law? Ah, yes; I daresay he is well-informed. Poor papa!"

"Why 'poor papa'?" said I. "I don't see the sequence—the connection between Jaffray's being well-informed and the poverty of your father."

She smiled, and her smile emphasized the enigmatical note of her phrases.

"Why 'poor papa'?" I enquired again.

"He thinks that you are his advocate and you begin to tell me that Mr. Jaffray is well-informed," she replied.

"There is something in that," said I thoughtfully—for it so happened that I was thinking at that moment; and what I thought was what I went on to say to her—"Perhaps I should have said that Mr. Jaffray may not be so free as he seems from those sentiments which make a man a rascal."

She turned upon me a quick glance.

"Whatever he may be he is certainly not a rascal," she said in a voice that corresponded with her glance.

"I am as certain of that as I am of my own existence," said I. "I only hoped to interest you in Mr. Jaffray."

"By suggesting that he might be a rascal?"

"How could I make a better attempt? If a girl is not interested in a rascal whom is she interested in? I did my best for Mr. Jaffray, though I did not hint at his rascality. And I do believe that I brought you to the verge of being interested in him."

"Oh, for that matter," said she. "For that matter——"

"You suggest that all men are interesting? You are wrong: some are novelists."

She smiled more enigmatically than ever. Now that I come to think of it, far removed from the stimulating influence of the sea, the air of the tropics, and the *cuisine* of the *Amazon*, I am not so sure that there was anything whatever enigmatical either in this smile or in the one that preceded it. It must have been their frankness which puzzled me at the moment. The Sphinx was feminine, to be sure, but it would be going too far to say

that everything feminine is a Sphinx. Frankness, however, is usually resorted to by one who wishes to conceal his (or her) real opinion.

At any rate, she smiled, and there was a long silence before she answered me. She looked across the water—blue as indigo, with a streak of pink reflected from the sky in the west where the sun had gone down; a flying-fish or two slipt slantwise into the air and went skimming and curving among the waves of our wake. She looked at them till they dropped into the water. Then she turned to me, saying—

“Flying-fish are the most interesting things that I have seen since I left England.”

“They are eminently palatable,” said I, “when cooked as they were at lunch to-day. As a comestible they have their use, but perhaps they are most useful when employed to turn one’s attention away from an inconvenient topic.”

“That was not in my mind,” she said. “You were talking about things that were interesting—and novelists. Well, I pointed out the flying-fish to you, and you admitted that they were interesting. What I really thought was this: Is the flying-fish anything the better off for being able to fly?”

“Mr. Burling will tell you that it flies in order to escape the shark—or is it the sword-fish—that wants to eat it.”

“Yes; but it flies into the boat of the Barbadian and it is cooked and eaten all the same.”

“True, quite true; and the moral of the fable of the flying-fish is, that when a young woman loves a young man on the land, she does not see how she would better herself by dropping him and taking to another aboard a steamer.”

She gave a little flush, saying in a low voice—

"Your moral is quite correct, only I think you had better put a more appropriate fable to it."

"If the moral is sound," said I, "it scarcely matters about the fable. Did I ever tell you the story of the Irish priest who got slightly mixed over the account of the miraculous feeding of the multitude?"

She confessed that she had never heard it.

"Well," said I, "Father Tim was preaching from the text of the loaves and fishes, but getting slightly mixed, he said that five men and two women were fed with five thousand loaves and the same number of fishes, and he was quite surprised that his congregation did not seem to perceive the miraculous element in the transaction. The next day, however, someone ventured to point out to him the mistake that he had made. In order to repair it he preached the next Sunday on the same subject, but this time he took care to state the case correctly. 'Five loaves and two small fishes to feed five thousand hungry people,' said he, 'think of that. What would any of us do if we were called upon to feed five thousand people and had only five loaves and two fishes to do it with? I ask ye again, What would any of us do?' 'Give them the leavings of last Sunday's sermon, Father Tim,' cried someone from the body of the chapel."

She asked me to tell her another story.

CHAPTER XII.

Before I turned in that night I made up my mind that I would never again worry this charming girl about her love affair. It was obvious that she took only the smallest amount of interest in the well-informed Mr. Jaffray, and it was extremely unlikely that she would ever take any more interest in him than she did at that time, even though he should develop a readiness of narrative equal to that with which Mr. Burling was gifted. I could not doubt that her heart was fixed upon the man whom she had met in London, and I felt that she was right and that he was an exceedingly fortunate man. She had probably posted a long letter to him at Barbados, and she would most likely begin another to him the next day—if indeed she had not begun one already. (I hoped that she would mention my name to him with some measure of kindliness).

When I awoke in the morning I found that the steamer was gliding past the two imposing mountains of the island of St. Lucia known as the Pitons. To say that these are sugar-loaf in shape is to state a fact ; but they are sugar-loaf in shape only because the original sugar-loaves were modelled on the shape of the Pitons. In the early dawn-light the twin mountains, rising sheer from the sea, looked very imposing. There was a cotton-wool fluff of mist sailing across the summit of the island

and it broke on coming in contact with the shoulder of one of the hills, but it still sailed on, leaving the peak standing like an islet in the midst of a sea of foam. The peaks were purple in the dawn, and as we moved past, the cotton fluff that floated on high became a swirl of pearly silk shot through and through with a lance of sunlight from below the horizon. In a second it became tenderly opalesque, swimming from peak to peak to be lost in the exquisite faint blue of the sky. But as it broke up we found that it had never been either cotton wool or silk ; it was a festoon of damask roses hanging between the peaks, for when it slipped over the shoulder of one of them, the air was filled with rose petals—there they tossed, quivering like feathers, every petal delicately pink—pearly pink—quivering, hovering, curling and swimming through the air.

But after all they were not petals of damask roses : they were a shower of shells which the spirits of the Pitons had gathered from the ocean depths through the night, and were now playfully hurling from the peak to meet the rising sun—all soft pink pearly shells, light enough to be blown about by every breeze.

The effect of the purple mountains against the faint blue of the sky was inexpressibly lovely, but this effect was immeasurably enhanced by the marvellous blue of the water. It was of the purest sapphire, and its colour seemed to come up from its depths, the surface being transparent. Such purity of colour I had never seen before—in the mountains, the sky, the sea. The colours were the colours of jewels—sapphire and amethyst and turquoise, and there were pearls being flung from the pink shells that were still quivering like flecks of foam in the air.

Passing the Pitons at sunrise, we crept between the low headlands at the entrance to the harbour at

Castries, and the full beauty of the hill-slope came into view. The harbour is certainly the safest in the West Indies, and within the past year or two, it has been greatly improved by the carrying out of certain operations against the coral reef which had been pronounced obstructive if not destructive. The entrance is narrow and the slopes on all sides are sufficiently high to afford ships perfect security from every wind that blows. The water is deep enough for the largest craft afloat. No glimpse that we had of Barbados suggested to us with the same force as did the marvellous slope above the town of Castries in St. Lucia, the tropical island which was the object of our quest.

The luxuriant vegetation after rioting over the slope came down to the water's edge. Such glories of growth I never saw even in Africa—palms and cactuses and aloes and plantains, all were here in abundance. The combinations of green all up the slopes on every hand were most refreshing. Here and there were dark patches—we could not make out the forms of the trees, but only got the general effect of the groups—patches of olive, and then came unaccountable spaces of emerald—*islands of emerald in oceans of olive*—and then acres of the spring green of sugar-cane. Streaks of mangoes and bananas and tamarinds gave all the charm of "detail" to the picture.

Government House was pointed out to me—a bower in the forest, a few hundred feet up the slope. Higher still are the Artillery Barracks. A few picturesque dwellings of the Madeira quinta pattern are dotted about the slope, a roof appearing here and there above the vegetation. The other arm of the bay is scarcely so imposing. The building operations which were going on around the barracks and the old fort will probably, when completed, diminish still further the picturesque element.

Only three or four ships were in the harbour—a very different state of things from that which prevailed on the eve of Rodney's glorious victory over de Grasse. It was between the two headlands that Rodney collected his fleet, and waited for the French frigates to come out from their anchorage at Dominica. What a bustle there must have been here from morning to night. Those splendid models of fighting ships with their yards apeak, all at the same angle, with their pennons flying, with their long rows of brass gun-muzzles looking through the gun-ports, the aspect of a bulldog held in leash about every one of them; and above these heavy-jowled guns looking out of their kennels, the high poop with the ornamental carving climbing up its side from the deck—a sea-horse, or a mermaid perhaps!

And in the water there must have been hundreds of ships' boats—galleys and pinnaces, and captains' gigs, and whale-boats, plying to and fro from the shore, rowed by seamen with glazed hats behind which hung a plaited queue with a ribbon knot at the end, all beautifully greased; and steered by a chubby midshipman, wearing a dirk. It may be taken for granted that there was no lack of visitors from the shore aboard the ships all day; and everyone has heard of the beauty of the Creole women, English as well as French. I am sure that they were as greatly interested in marine architecture in those days as they are now, and I am certain that the traditions of the navy for hospitality were as rigidly observed aboard the hearts of oak as they are within the plates of chilled steel. The white population in the days of Rodney must have been largely French, and I fancy that some of them—perhaps even the loveliest of the Creole ladies—required a good deal of looking after: a message conveyed to Dominica would have spoilt the admiral's plan. No doubt that vigilance and hospitality went

hand in hand when Rodney was in command. I can picture for myself the dance going on aboard one of the ships every night just as the Duchess of Richmond's ball went on, when joy was unconfined, on the eve of Waterloo; but we may be perfectly certain that the admiral had his reports brought to him from the look-out on the headlands, where all telescopes were turned in the direction of Dominica. And then the morning came when those of the islanders who were looking forward to a day of festivity aboard the flag-ship, saw from their windows such a sight as will never be seen in the world again—mighty three-deckers with all their white canvas spread, sailing out of the harbour to achieve the greatest of England's naval victories.

But now—well, just now our steamer is being hauled alongside three mountains of coal—that is all that we can see—a Pelion and Ossa and Olympus of coal, shutting out the pictures of green hills beyond; and yet around these coal heaps there are palms waving languidly in the morning breeze. There it is before us, the all-powerful English coal, which sent Rodney's frigates to be broken up and their acres of canvas to the marine store, never again to be hoisted between spars of elm for the undoing of an enemy's flotilla. And this is what the passengers are grumbling at, the taking aboard of this coal. It may be all-powerful, it certainly is all-grimy.

And the manner of coaling! Sparsely clad men and women rendered by grime a shade blacker than nature had made them, streamed forth from the coal yards, each carrying a good-sized basket of the "best Welsh steam" on his or her head. On they came, in single file, not the space of a foot separating any two, up the planks, and after unburdening themselves, countermarching on a second plank back to the coal yard for a fresh supply. To watch them was to become mesmerized. One felt

that one was not looking at men and women, but at the strange weird figures of a dream—a horrible nightmare of the Inferno—spectres of the Lost, doomed to an everlasting tramp, tramp, tramp, and carrying their own fuel with them to replenish the infernal flames.

When I recovered myself I fled from that nightmare down the hand-rail and on to the shore.

The quay-side was crowded. In addition to a few thousands of fervid religionists—plain and coloured and mezzo-tinted—who had come to welcome the Archbishop, there were a number of Khaki soldiermen who, we could see, were doing their best to look bored by the unchastened fervour of the common crowd. The unbridled religionism which was manifested by his brethren and sisters was not for the soldierman. He knew that every one of those who were receiving the benediction of his Grace, had taken all the precautions known to the Obi to enable him or her to have a successful day of idleness. Then there were sable policemen, clothed in white samite to the spike of their helmets, taking a considerate view of the weaknesses of their weaker brethren and still weaker sisters. It was surely weak of the negro sister to show herself as strong as her brother in coal carrying; and if it came to a row—but the policemen would never let it come to a row.

And everyone in the crowd was talking on some important topic to everyone else. The effect was like that of a scene in the House of Commons on an Irish night—one of the good old Irish nights. But the Archbishop had no trouble in working his way through the welcoming crowds.

No one could be ashore at Castries for long without becoming aware of the difference between the people here and those of Bridgetown. Castries is distinctly French. The women walk in a curious mincing way, and

carry their burdens on their heads in a coquettish manner ; and it is surprising how much coquetry there is room for without imperilling the safety of the " washing " which they are bearing home, or the banana branches which they mean to sell. Their clothing too is distinctly of a Parisian cut, and it is not intolerably décolleté. The colouring is as tawdry as one finds in the best Parisian circles, but the hues of the kerchiefs in which they envelop their heads are truly tropical. Nothing in Nature can compete with them ; most women seem to carry a tropical sunset on their heads ; those who are somewhat shy make it a rainbow, the most retiring aim at nothing more striking than a halo of orange.

One cannot but feel how extraordinary it is to find the French influence still prevailing in this place, although it has not been in the possession of the French for a century. It is indeed remarkable to find in every island in this archipelago the early influences of its planting still at work. Barbados is essentially English—essentially Royalist. One knows perfectly well what view will be taken by the people in any particular question. In St. Lucia the people are French and speak a curious *patois*, a very easy-going sort of French, which I do not think would satisfy a purist, though I suppose that St. Lucian French is not more corrupt than Whitechapel English. Every island seems to have its characteristics, which nearly always can be traced to their source, just as the New England nasal twang is said to be a survival of the sing-song unction of the Puritan ancestor, and the curious broadening of some of the vowels which prevails in some parts of Ireland is said to have been caught from the Danes.

A curious form which the conservatism of these islands assumes is found in the currency. In England we all

know that we seldom meet with coins of an older date than the reign of Queen Victoria ; but on receiving change for a sovereign at Barbados, I found two five-shilling pieces of the date of George III., some shillings of George IV., and a half-crown of George II. I was constantly struck by the absence of all coins bearing the Queen's head. When I mentioned this to a planter, he said that what struck him and his friends most strongly was the absence of all coins whatsoever.

It occurred to me that the sanitary officials should order a spring cleaning of the coinage. Some of the five-shilling pieces which I handled bore the Bertillon marks of a former possessor who might have been present at the engagement between Rodney and de Grasse.

CHAPTER XIII.

I crossed the little bridge at the quay-side and wandered through the crowds into the town of Castries, turning aside for a few minutes into a ship-builder's yard—the first that I had visited since I had been at Harland and Wolff's. This one was not so large.

The firm had on the stocks a smack of five tons and was laying down the keel of another of six, but this pressure of business did not cripple the resources of the yard, for two ship's punts were being repaired and the job was likely to be a long one. I must say that the lines of the smacks were vigorous, with a generous breadth of beam. No America Cup lifters, these, but good stout sea boats. The ship-building industry of Castries is likely to increase its annual output, I learned, for owing to the influx of business the resources of the firm have been strained to the uttermost, and an extra hand has to be employed in addition to the man and the boy who are the employes at present. It is gratifying to learn that no strike has ever taken place in any of the departments of this shipyard. This may be because there is no proper organization of the labour in this industry in the island. I daresay that with the co-operation of a few of those platform loafers known as labour leaders in England, even the shipwrights of St. Lucia could be screwed up to striking point.

The stagnation in the streets of the town contrasted with the business activity of Bridgetown. The shops were small and squalid, though here and there one comes across a good store house of prodigious emptiness, suggesting a brilliant past. The cathedral—every island has its cathedral—which is situated at one side of a delightful square of green grass and fine old trees—one of them a magnificent mango—is a grandiose building of somewhat mixed styles of architecture. The early planters, contrary to what is generally supposed of them, must have been a deeply religious set of men ; their church building was on a grand scale in every island. Few cities in England can boast of churches of the dimensions of those which adorn these West Indian villages, and certainly none that stand in so great need of the kindly offices of incense.

I strolled into the Castries Cathedral and found that mass had already been celebrated under the patronage of the Archbishop. The incense had not been pungent enough to neutralize the sudorific effect of the mass upon the negro congregation. The cathedral has no art treasures either in the shape of pictures or plate. I fear that if the churches of the Spanish Main had been no better equipped in the old days, Sir Francis Drake and the other pirates would not have been able to pay their way and satisfy the Official Receiver, who in the case of Drake, was Queen Elizabeth. A few tawdry and tattered flowers cut out of paper, and a Virgin clad in second-hand passementerie represented the art jealously guarded by the church.

It was not, however, until I had left the Cathedral and wandered some way along the well-kept street beside it, that I became aware of the trend of the people's taste. The houses, all of which were of the suburban villa type with pretty gardens, were decorated in honour

of the visit of the Archbishop. They were gracefully festooned with roses, and so great a profusion of tropical flowers as caused them to seem in a blaze of glory. I could not help sighing as I recollected the floral decorations which I had witnessed in an English village a short time before. I had thought the harvest festival festoons very rich indeed: they were quite eclipsed by those which hung before my eyes—they were as moonlight unto sunlight—as an old English garden to a tropical jungle. But of course it was only to be expected that the decorations at home should seem pale compared with these. If one should not find a blaze of floral profusion in one of these islands where should one look for it?

Unfortunately I had to pass close to the house at the corner. One of the festoons had fallen from its nail, and then I saw that this blaze of tropical luxuriance was due to the tint of the paper out of which the blossoms were cunningly made. The whole scheme of decoration had tinted tissue paper for its foundation. Of course there was no reason why art should not take the place of nature in such a scheme: it is perfectly legitimate to use artificial roses to contribute to the éclat of what was probably an artificial welcome to the Archbishop. But I thought that it would have been as easy for the people of a tropical island to provide real flowers of at least a splendour equal to that of the paper blooms.

I continued my stroll until I came to a genuine negro street—a broad, well-kept road with a row of huts embowered among mangoes and palms and bananas, having for a background one of the most glorious glens that could be imagined—a glen with all the variations of green that I had noticed on the slope in the early morning sunlight, but here I could distinguish growth from growth—the uncouth struggle of a row of cactuses,

the delicate transparency of the great banana fronds, pure and liquid as the green of chrysoprase—here and there the motionless plume of a giant palm, and higher up the slope the dewy dazzle of a stretch of sugar-cane.

And in the foreground there stood a negro mother spoiling a rod and certainly not sparing her offspring at the same time. It was refreshing to observe the complete mastery which the good mother displayed over the light bamboo that a luxuriant nature, anticipating her need, had planted ready for her handling. She boxed the compass with that bamboo. Every wriggle found her ready. The yelling imp of blackness which she held between her knees dived and plunged and reversed himself between the pivots of his mother's knee-caps. It made no difference to her : bang went the bamboo, and every hit was a boundary. I felt that she had completely mastered the bowling, as it were. A more genuine and artistic piece of work I had never seen. Flogging is practically a lost art in England in these days. I trust that I shall not be misunderstood when I say that flagellation is more honoured in the breach than in the observance. But I am old enough to remember it in its palmy days, and I am thus in a position to affirm that should there be any movement set on foot for its resuscitation, there is at St. Lucia at least one negress whom I could conscientiously recommend for a professorship when the science becomes endowed by Mr. Carnegie.

I mentioned the feats of the woman with admiration to a shopkeeper whom I visited in the same street—I had seen a peculiar candy in his window which I thought might yield its flavour under the pressure of a steam-roller or a little nigger's teeth—and he laughed.

"She should be a pretty fair hand at it," he said. "Oh, yes, she oughter; fact is, sir, she's a carpet-beater by trade."

I got rid of the candy—I heard the crunching of it still when the little nigger boys had dwindled to the dimension of ants—and strolled along a delightful road in another direction. Here were a few well-built and well-kept villas ; I could see the neat-handed Phyllises doing their morning dusting round the windows, but they were not so busily occupied as to be oblivious of the passing of a stranger. They had as many stunsails flying as any hospital nurse, and their teeth were like a bold excerpt from a chalk-pit. If they had appetites to correspond they must have led rather happy lives, provided that they were frugivorous.

I found that the road took a turn to the left and wound itself through a plantation of bamboos and bananas and guavas, crossing a small stream whose babbling was refreshing, for I was walking straight into the sunshine. After half a mile or so I found myself on the slope, making a gradual ascent among the lines of leaves—all tropical growths, vast in size and innumerable as to multitude. There was a dance of butterflies in the air—bewildering beauties of all colours—rays of red sunshine seen through the slits among the leafage—a hum of gorgeous insects ; but no sound of footsteps. The road seemed unknown to anyone in the island, and its seclusion was to me entrancing.

In spite of the warnings which I had received in respect of the *fer de lance*—the most deadly of all snakes—of which there are numbers on the island, I turned aside from the road and lay down under the grateful shade of a banana plant, its huge leaves hanging over me like an awning of pale green silk. I felt the need to drink in all that I could of the scene—to get into my life something of the true spirit of the Tropic wilderness.

Alas, it is only given to poets to get behind the veil

of mystery which is wrapped about these things and only one in a thousand gets there. He it is that comes to know their language, and is able to commune with them—spirit to spirit—and then to act as their interpreter to the world. But who is there that can interpret between us and this tropical wilderness? We feel around us the tumult of life pulsating in everything of this place—we are conscious of the overwhelming impulses of production and growth ; but that is all of which the ordinary man is aware. The poem is sung in his ears in a strange tongue. He is vaguely aware of its rhythm—the majestic swing of its lines ; but that is all. Its import is as mysterious as ever. We lack an interpreter. We see the beautiful face of this glorious Nature : but we want to hear the voice of its soul speaking to our souls in a language that we can understand.

We men who are a part of this Nature that we see, feel ourselves to be apart from Nature. Since first the fallacy of that life which is ours to-day became promulgated under the name of civilization, our life has been made up of perpetual compromises with Nature. She may be our mother, but we have become so scandalized by her skittishness that we decline to live any longer in the same house with her. We have made her an allowance, and while she lives and riots on the estate, regardless of the consequences, we have gone into a respectable lodging-house, where we have regular meals and hold as little communication with her as possible.

That is why a man finds it necessary to throw himself on Nature's lap every now and again, full of yearning to hear once again the voice of his discarded mother speaking to him in her language, which he also discarded—a word or two of comfort that he can understand.

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I wonder if I fell asleep. If I did it would be just like one of Nature's pranks. At any rate, I was sitting up, having become aware of an unaccustomed sound—the sound of feet on the road. In that jungle I had the instinct of the jungle whence we sprang. A stranger meant an enemy. I lay low and waited.

Where the banana leaves rose in their graceful curve from their stem, there was a space that permitted me to see a part of the road—half-a-dozen yards or so about a hundred feet from me on the upward slope. Into this space sauntered a young man and a young woman, and the right hand of the one was grasping the left hand of the other, and the hands thus joined were swinging to and fro after the fashion of the hands of children or lovers, and the man was Mr. Jaffray and the woman was Miss Ormsby.

I never got such a shock in my life. I never before felt when quite awake that I was dreaming. The thing that I saw seemed to me the most amazing—one of the incredibilities of the landscape of a dream.

And then the arms ceased swinging: the pair had stopped on the only space of the road that permitted of my seeing them, and they were standing face to face. The man drew her hand to him and held it to his chest, while he looked down into her eyes, and he looked as if he had found them to be the companionable eyes that I had fancied they were the day I came aboard the *Avon*. Those eyes were looking up to his and so they continued for perhaps a minute. Then the man bent his head down to hers until their lips must have been together.

At this point my senses—my civilized senses—came back to me. I crept further into my bower of bananas, heedless of the *fer de lance*—on through the dense undergrowth, keeping gradually to my right. I guessed that

this movement would enable me to reach the bank of the little stream which I had crossed on the road, and I was not mistaken. I had not to go more than a quarter of a mile before I got to the stream and to Mr. Ormsby. He was sitting on the bank with his boots and socks off, paddling in the water.

I fancy that I must have had a guilty look. I know that I had a guilty feeling, and I daresay I made a movement as if I wished to avoid him, for he hailed me.

"Hullo! don't run away. I'm not a savage," he cried. "Where do you come from? We saw you go into the ship-carpenter's when we were coming ashore—Myra and Mr. Jaffray—we thought that you were going to spend the day there. We strolled up here. She did not know that Mr. Jaffray was coming with me. I'm afraid that she will be wild. They are gone on—I sent them—to find if the road leads to the Botanical Gardens or something. They have barely been gone five minutes and are sure to be back presently. I could not resist the temptation of taking off my boots and socks and having a quiet paddle. You won't leave me to bear the brunt of—oh, there they are, hailing us from the bridge."

I looked to one side. Sure enough, Miss Ormsby and Mr. Jaffray were on the bridge, and the girl was waving her white sunshade to her father.

I had just sufficient presence of mind to take off my hat and give an answering salutation—I had nothing to spare. I was wondering if I had walked through this banana jungle in my sleep—if I had quite awakened even yet—if I had really seen anything going on between the openings of my green silk awning.

They made their way to us along the thirty yards or so of the river that separated us. They wished me good morning, and enquired if I had seen anything wonderful in the ship-building yard.

And both of them looked as innocent as infants ! She was as free from embarrassment as a marble statue when kissed by a garden Zephyr. He said that so far as they could gather the road led right up the slope, and that there was no need for a Botanical Garden—the whole place was one.

“ Do you think did you go far enough ? ” enquired Mr. Ormsby, glancing from Mr. Jaffray to his daughter.

“ Oh, yes ; I think we did,” she replied ; and I agreed with her in my own mind, though I held my peace.

Mr. Ormsby shook his head as if he were not quite convinced. I could see that he had an idea that his daughter had insisted on Mr. Jaffray’s going only a few hundred yards with her, so great a distaste had she for his company. I watched him drying his feet and pulling on his socks. It was clear that this simple gentleman had made the most of the ten minutes that his daughter had been away from his side, and that he rather wished that she had kept away for half an hour.

I was silent—guiltily silent—while I watched Mr. Ormsby completing his toilet. I could not look at Miss Ormsby lest I should betray my secret. Happily she was not in a mood to attach any significance to my taciturnity. She was rapturous over the scenery of the island—over the gorgeous vegetation—over the effect of the sunlight that got entrapped among the transparent leaves. If I had only gone a little further on the road I should have seen a picture that would have delighted me, she affirmed.

I wondered if she saw me blushing. I know that I felt a burning blush just between my shoulder blades. Her innocent prattle had a pudorific effect upon me. But still she went on to talk of the pictures—of the vegetation—of the views of the mountain with its glens and the blue sea in the distance—such a blue !

What painter would dare to put such a blue into a picture ? she asked.

I thought I knew one but I did not tell her his name : and then her father gave a stamp or two to settle his boots well down on his feet, and, his face brightening every minute hearing her delightful speech, he said—

“ So you enjoyed your little stroll up the slope of the road, my dear ? ”

“ Oh, I never enjoyed anything so much,” she replied, and her eyes were looking straight out to the sea, with never a side glance at the man who had accompanied her on that pleasant stroll of hers, and who had (possibly) contributed to the fascination which it seemed to have had for her.

The man was busily engaged in pulling to pieces some plant which he had got a hold of. He looked at it through a magnifying glass and communicated to us some strange facts regarding its origin and the purpose that it fulfilled in nature’s economy. I have always said that he was an exceedingly well-informed man—for a barrister-at-law.

Miss Ormsby paid only the scantiest amount of attention to the information which he imparted to us out of his storehouse. Her eyes were still turned seaward ; and she twirled her white sunshade on her shoulder. This made her father rather impatient, as anyone except a daughter could see.

He was frowning and inclined to fuss, when a sudden thought struck him.

“ You needn’t wait for me, Myra,” he said. “ You can go on to the steamer with Mr. Jaffray ; we ”—he indicated me—“ shall follow you. I think we should do well to go on to the part of the road where you said there was a view that pleased you so well.”

I saw that what was in the poor gentleman’s mind

was to punish his poor daughter for her indifference to Mr. Jaffray : he would condemn her to his company for at least another half hour.

"Oh, we can all go together," cried Myra. "I don't mind returning to the road—it is not more than five minutes' walk."

I gasped. I was being brought face to face with a feminine trait that was altogether new to me. I wanted to see more of it.

But before the situation became acute we were all startled by a clatter of hoofs on the road. We turned our eyes toward the little bridge and saw Major Wingfield pull up the pony which he had been galloping, on the banks of the stream, and throw himself off the saddle, limping down to the water. When at the brink he filled a bottle from the stream and in hot haste mounted the bank again.

"Something has happened," cried Miss Ormsby. "There has been an accident—Miss Hope——"

"I have my flask," said her father. "Perhaps we can be of some assistance."

I hailed Wingfield, hastening to him, when he was in the act of mounting his pony—one of the wiry little "Creoles," as the breed is called in the island.

"We were wondering if anything unpleasant had happened—Mr. Ormsby has a flask."

"Oh, nothing unpleasant—only Mrs. Krux has fainted—there was some fuss about a snake," said Wingfield. "I daresay that the water will pull her round all right, confound her ! But it's as likely as not that a flask will come in handy. Fetch it along. You'll find us a bit further on."

Mr. Ormsby and the others came up just as he put his pony to a gallop once more, returning on the road by which he had come. He gave them a salute.

I told them that nothing disagreeable had happened. It was not Miss Hope but Mrs. Krux who had met with an accident. They had heard Wingfield mention a snake. Was it possible that Mrs. Krux had been bitten by a *fer de lance*?

Miss Ormsby became white.

"If she has been bitten by a *fer de lance* she will be dead within an hour," said Jaffray, the well-informed.

"Yes," said I, "if a *fer de lance* has bitten her it will be dead well within the hour."

Myra Ormsby turned a reproving eye upon me.

"I'm not unsympathetic; no one has been bitten," said I. "Wingfield knows as much about snake bites as anyone, and he said 'confound her!' If she were in danger he would have pardoned her for—for having done her duty."

"I hope it's nothing serious," said Mr. Ormsby. "But a snake——"

"It sounds like one of Mr. de Rougemont Burling's, doesn't it?" remarked Mr. Jaffray.

"I never travel without a flask," said Mr. Ormsby.

While we were discussing probabilities we were walking rather more rapidly than we should have been, considering the heat of the sun, along the road. About half a mile from the bridge, just where there was a steep bit, we came upon a buggy, and at a short distance there was a group that included Wingfield, Miss Hope, Mr. Sowerby and the two Kruxes—the lady sitting limply beneath the shade of a plantain while Miss Hope fanned her with a leaf. On the dusty road lay a dead snake quite three feet in length.

Some of us were badly out of breath, but Mr. Ormsby was able to gasp out an offer of his flask. It was gratefully accepted by Mr. Sowerby, who was doing the part of restorer in chief; Mr. Krux was seated in the shade

smoking a rank cigar and reading the *Strand Magazine*.

His wife's eyes were open, and she was speaking in a low voice to Miss Hope. She drank some of Mr. Ormsby's brandy mixed with a little of the water brought by Wingfield. I could see that the worst was over, whatever might have happened.

"The snake—no one was actually bitten?" said Mr. Ormsby in a whisper.

"Major Wingfield killed it," cried Miss Hope, raising her head. "He killed it with a stick and it is dead."

"It is dead," said I. "That is probably the result of its being killed. It is these after affects that so often prove fatal."

Though I spoke in a very low voice, the opinion seemed to be general that my remarks were in very bad taste; so they were. That was probably why Wingfield and Miss Hope laughed, keeping well in the shade of the plantain.

"I can't make it out," said Mr. Krux, turning and twisting the *Strand Magazine* under his eyes, and peering at the page from every angle. "I can't make it out! They tell you to look at the picture of the oak tree sideways and you'll see King Charles II. hidden among the branches. But I've tried every angle and I can't see a bit of him. Have a try at the thing, some of you."

"If he's hidden among the branches it is no wonder that you can't see him," said I.

The invalid became interested. She was in the habit of spending a good deal of her time over picture puzzles, worrying over acrostics and such like devices. She held out a trembling yellow hand for the magazine; but her husband would not part with it: he kept frowning at the picture puzzle, closing first his left eye, then his right, finally both eyes; but even this expedient did not enable him to master the mystery. The lady became impatient. He passed the magazine to her, but very reluctantly,

keeping his eyes screwed up and his head slightly bent as he sent it on, as if he hoped to find inspiration at the last moment.

Mr. Ormsby looked at his watch ostentatiously.

"I don't want to break up a pleasant little party," said he; "but I think it right to mention that we must be aboard the steamer within an hour and a half."

"How time flies," said Mr. Krux yawning.

Between us we managed to help Mrs. Krux into the buggy. She was very weak, and the sight of the snake lying across the road gave her another turn.

Mr. Krux cast a malignant glance at the reptile which had not bitten his wife.

"After all it's not a *fer de lance*," said Major Wingfield turning the thing about with his stick. "I don't believe that it was a deadly snake."

"Oh, in that case——" said Mr. Krux.

He seemed to wish to convey to us his unreserved withdrawal of the malignant glance. After all the poor thing had done its best.

"I think I shall walk back to the steamer with Miss Ormsby," said Miss Hope. "The buggy only holds three, with the driver, and Mr. Sowerby must look after Mrs. Krux."

Mr. Krux protested his willingness to walk; but the young woman was firm.

Wingfield mounted his pony and saying "au revoir" to us, trotted off.

"He has a good seat," remarked Mr. Krux, looking after him.

"Tell us all about it," said Miss Ormsby, when the buggy had got a fair way ahead of us, and we were about to follow it. Of course she was addressing Miss Hope. Anyone could see that Miss Hope was anxious to tell all that there was to be told.

But considering the circumstances, she was marvelously direct in her story. It appeared that it was by the merest accident that Major Wingfield was riding down the road when the buggy party, having left their vehicle a short way off, were walking up it. Miss Hope was unable to say if the snake had actually attacked them or if it was merely crossing the road ; in any case, however, Mrs. Krux and the rest were panic-stricken, and the lady had fainted on the road. As good luck would have it, Major Wingfield, hearing their outcry, had dashed up, and throwing himself from his pony, had boldly faced the snake and killed it with his malacca riding crop.

That was the whole story as told by the girl. She seemed to break off rather abruptly and to feel that a more artistic conclusion was necessary, for, after a pause, she said—

“ It was very brave of Major Wingfield.”

We all agreed that it was very brave of Major Wingfield.

“ It was fortunate for us that he chanced to be so close at hand,” said she, encouraged by our hearty acquiescence.

We all agreed that it was fortunate for Mrs. Krux and her party that he was so close at hand.

Some of us could not help thinking that it was very fortunate for Major Wingfield as well.

CHAPTER XIV.

Once more the steamer was in motion, and we were lying in our deck-chairs looking across the sapphire sea to the olive and emerald slopes of St. Lucia.

Of course there was a large amount of comment among our fellow-passengers upon the slaughter of the snake. As it was understood that somehow I was mixed up in the affair, I was invited to corroborate the story in its various details. Was the snake really ten feet long? I was asked. Had it really sprung out from the branches of a tree upon Mrs. Krux? Was it really the case that Major Wingfield had produced a pet mongoose and set it on the snake at the critical moment?

Only one youth—although he had changed his route of travel he had not yet succeeded in speaking a word to Miss Hope—held the theory that the whole incident had been got up by Wingfield to give him a chance of posing as a hero.

"I know that sort of chap," he said with a sardonic smile. "He has been in India, and I know all about India—I've read Kipling. Haven't you heard of the fakes like this which fellows have got up there?"

I admitted that I had heard of fakirs.

"Don't tell me that a snake would jump out at Mrs. Krux," said he.

"I won't—in justice to the snake," said I.

"This is an age of self-advertisement," he sighed. "I expect that that poor deluded girl thinks Wingfield no end of a hero."

I told him that I shouldn't be at all surprised if she did. He gave me to understand that he trusted in me to undeceive her. He sympathized with me in this responsibility which devolved on me, and I thanked him.

Mr. Burling was mindful that he had a position as a naturalist to maintain: he seemed to suggest that it was hazardous for any party to go ashore at one of the islands without first telling him. He illustrated his theory by several stories having more or less connection with snakes.

Mr. Fraser, who had unsuccessfully tried to get up on the island a *matinée* of his lecture on the Temple of Solomon, spoke seriously to Wingfield on the subject of collaborating with him in a future lecture on the Snakes of the Old Testament.

Mrs. Heber had a word of compliment for Wingfield; so that on the whole he felt thoroughly bored, and expressed the wish that all these people who were bothering him would be taken possession of by one particular snake who played an important part in Old Testament history.

For myself I confess that I was thinking less of that half farcical snake incident than of the glimpses which I had obtained between the banana leaves, of a phase of femininity that had startled me.

The more I thought of the duplicity—I liked to think of it as duplicity—of Myra Ormsby, the more amazed did I become. Not for one moment had I imagined it to be possible that such a girl as she—one whose love I felt sure was a pearl of great price—a jewel that would enrich the man who was fortunate enough to secure it—a gem to cherish all one's life—a thing to live for—to

die for—would cast to the winds every memory of the man to whom she professed to be devoted, and give her face to be kissed by another whom she had not known for a fortnight.

I felt quite like Hamlet brooding over his mother's weakness. I could hear myself murmuring, "Oh, Woman—Woman!" and "But one short month"—only it was not even as short a month as February out of Leap Year; it was barely a fortnight since she had met Jaffray—Jaffray who had been chosen by her father to take the place of the man whom she loved!

I was forced reluctantly to admit that Mr. Ormsby, who had been all his life engaged in trade in the Midlands, knew much more about women and their ways than I did. It was humiliating to reflect that all the time I had been laughing at him, with a sneer now and again, he had been displaying an acquaintance with the ways of a maid such as I could never pretend to. He had gone on the silly cynical principle of treating a woman in love as a reasoning being. He went further than the proverb which affirms that out of sight is out of mind. The proverb says nothing about the heart. He had, as it were, flung this new man at her—flung him with no knowledge of the science of projection—hurled him rudely at her, caring for nothing only that he should fall close to her; and yet he had succeeded in overcoming the girl's natural shrinking from a new lover presented to her in this unceremonious fashion.

For myself, I felt as if I could never bring myself to speak to Myra Ormsby again—to any girl again, so rude a jar had I received in this matter. The incident meant the shattering of my most cherished ideal—the constancy of a woman.

And when I reflected upon the details of the incident I felt even more bitter than I had done in taking a

general view of what had happened. Only four days had passed since she had demolished (so I thought) her father's hopes by the shrug she had given when I mentioned the name of Jaffray—only the previous day she had, at the hotel at Barbados, shown her complete indifference to the man, and yet she had let him swing her arm as though he were her brother, and bend his face down to hers as though he were her old lover and not her new.

But really what I felt most acutely was her return to her old bearing in respect of Mr. Jaffray. Although only ten minutes had elapsed since he had proposed to her and she had accepted him, she had assumed in respect of him her former bearing of indifference—bored indifference, and he had been self-possessed enough to make us acquainted with some of the structural charms of a water-weed which he had picked from the stream !

I must confess that I felt humiliated at these reflections which were forced upon me, and which lasted for a long time. I suppose that really what I felt most deeply was the blow which my vanity had received. I felt taken in by that girl ; and I cannot fancy any more poignant sense of humiliation than that which is the result of the reflection that one has been taken in by a girl.

I fully expected that before we should arrive at Martinique, Mr. Ormsby would come to me in an outburst of elation, to let me know how well his plan had succeeded, for he had been sitting for close upon an hour beside Jaffray, and I could not doubt that the latter was giving him a rough idea of what had passed between Miss Ormsby and himself during the ten minutes or so that Mr. Ormsby had been paddling in the strange stream. I wondered if the father would really think well of his daughter for having been untrue at such very

short notice to the man whom she had loved on leaving England.

I came to the conclusion that he would regard her conduct as a personal tribute to his own judgment. He knew what was good for her and she acquiesced in his choice.

He did not come to me all the afternoon and I was left to say without interruption "Oh, Woman, Woman" as many times as I thought necessary to meet the requirements of the situation.

We were scarcely out of sight of the green slope of St. Lucia before we were gazing across the water at the cliffs of Martinique. We crept quite close to the shore and saw that the precipitous valleys which seamed the mountain side were more wildly wooded than anything we had seen at St. Lucia. We were close enough to make out the configuration of many of those gigantic rocks which volcanic eruptions of thousands of years ago had flung like dice into the depths of those mysterious glens. The vegetation at this uncultivated side of the island was riotous. Long valleys were jungles—wild places of strange trees, some of them stunted in their growth, others luxuriant beyond imagination; and wherever there was a spare yard of soil a palm had found foothold. On one of the ridges there was a long line of palms, each clearly marked against the sky.

In a short time the two peaks of Mont Pelée came in view with the town of St. Pierre stretching, after the manner of West Indian towns, along the curve of an immense bay; and as we approached the roadstead we saw once more the grateful pale green of the tracts of sugarcane, giving variety to the dull green of the mountain slopes above the town. We steamed closer and closer, and when, within half a mile of the shore, our anchor was let go, we found ourselves facing an immense town

sprawling in every direction, the houses having the same sickly half-caste expression of many of those at Bridgetown and of all at Castries. Red roofs there were by the hundred, giving the idea of coloured handkerchiefs round the heads of pale mulattoes. Almost in the centre arose the twin towers of the cathedral, clearly an immense building. Several other structures of imposing dimensions could be seen among the lines of streets and partly up the slope. Close to where the waves were curling along the beach was a row of warehouses that would have done credit to a large seaport. All of them were empty. They were standing merely as melancholy monuments of the days when they were all too small to meet the requirements of the commerce.

When we dropped anchor, only three vessels were in the roadstead—one was an American excursion steamer, the second was an American barque and the third an American brig. There was a rumour that a French frigate was somewhere about, but we did not see her. This may have been due to strategy on her part. Her commander may have taken a lesson out of Rodney's log-book and been in hiding in some secluded nook known to himself alone, waiting to pounce down upon us should we make an attempt to capture the island.

The beauty of the vegetation up the slope, and the picturesque situation of the town of St. Pierre, with the sparkling, transparent sea quivering in the sunlight before it unrolled its floss in a long line upon the beach, gave the island the appearance of a veritable Paradise. But this was not the region suggested by the creatures in the boats that surrounded the *Amazon* the moment the gun had been fired. Boats were round her by the hundred, and every boat was crammed with such savages as might have stood to Gustave Doré as models for some of his figures when he was illustrating the

Inferno. Wild, gesticulating, jabbering creatures—yelling demons, with greedy eyes and mouths like the mouth of a hippopotamus—noses—they had no noses.

Such negroes I had never before seen. About most coloured people there is something pleasing—a suggestion of early innocence—something that induces you to begin conversation with them by a joke—something that makes you think of them as children; but one would as soon think of jesting with Cerberus as with one of the Martinique savages. Among them there was squabbling, and sprawling and gesticulating, with an occasional fight. We could not exchange a remark among ourselves until the barge of one of the officials who was coming aboard, pushed the boats to right and left.

“Only man is vile,” was the first remark made by Mr. Fraser. He had been taking snap-shots of the boats and their crews. (He told me later in the day that he was preparing a new lecture for the autumn on the Peoples of Pandemonium).

“Martinique is the Paradise of the West Indies,” said young Mr. Gilbertson, who had been reading from a guide book.

His quotation had been interjected between two such spells of jabbering as I never heard outside the House of Commons. That was why we all laughed.

Only Professor Dugdale was solemn.

“There is reason to believe that the island of Martinique is the entrance to the Infernal Regions,” said he. “I have only a superficial knowledge of geology, but before I left England I met with a noted geologist and seismologist, and he assured me that his calculations convinced him that those two peaks which we see above the town, are the pillars at the entrance-gate to the region of eternal fire.”

“I had no idea that Mont Pelée was so interesting,”

said Mrs. Heber. "I thought that it was nothing more than a foolish extinct volcano. We must go up Mont Pelée whatever else we miss," she added, turning to look for her husband.

Her husband was talking a sort of French to the official who had come aboard—I could just hear the words—

"Prenez ma parole, Monsieur : il est un homme très mal usé. Je le connais ; il est un brav' général—j'ai servi au dessous de lui."

"I can well believe the conclusions of your geologist when I cast my eye over the side," said Aytoun. "If yon is the entrance to the Pit, those are creatures that look pretty congenial to the locality."

"There are a good many people who believe that Napoleon Bonaparte was an incarnation of the Fiend himself," continued Professor Dugdale. "More people have believed in this theory than in any other. Personally I have no doubt on the subject ; and the woman who put power within his grasp came from Martinique. Bonaparte would never have got command of the army in Italy if he had not married Josephine de Beauharnais. That moment established a Power of Evil such as was never before known in the world. That is what convinces me of the truth of my friend's deduction. No scheme of Hell can be considered scientifically or ethically without introducing Martinique."

"And it was left for the only Christian power in Europe to crush the Fiend Napoleon Bonaparte," said Mr. Fraser with the proper pride of an English non-conformist.

"How silly one feels who has been thinking of Martinique only in regard to the probability of getting one's Kodak films developed, when such lofty discourse is going on," said Miss Crofton to me in a low voice.

"Will you let me go ashore with you ; between us we are pretty sure to find some demon who will develop our films ?" said I.

"It would be so good of you to come with me," she cried. "My father is not very well to-day, and I don't think that even I could venture ashore alone at such a place as this."

"We will go together," said I joyfully. I had a spasm of joy at that moment when I looked at this handsome woman, with her comfortable face, with a grey hair or two showing amongst the brown tresses that she had carefully coiled above the shapely hollow of her neck. I felt that I had had enough of Miss Ormsby for some time. I knew that by the side of Miss Crofton I should not run the chance of seeing any more of my ideals lying shattered in the dust.

The instant that we landed we found ourselves surrounded by hundreds of brother demons to those which we had left in the boats, still jabbering and gesticulating, around the steamer, and we had to fight our way from the wharf to the town. We were only saved by the diversion of the energies of evil toward some more recently landed passengers.

Excellent buildings, large shops and stores were to be seen on all sides. In the principal thoroughfare—it ran parallel with the shore, but some distance up the terrace on which St. Pierre was built—there were two long rows of awnings in front of shop windows, and the canvas being striped and the jalousies above being painted a bright green, the effect of the whole street was quite brilliant.

St. Pierre and its people formed the most ridiculous parody upon a French town that could be imagined. The better class of the negro population walked with the studied swagger of the Boulevardier, and wore their hats

rakishly cocked, casting impudent glances at the ladies in every group of strangers, whether American or English. They had no sense of good manners, never hesitating for a moment to brush up against any strangers who might be standing for a minute or two at a corner ; following up this insult by exchanging with a passing acquaintance a volley of half indecent sallies regarding their visitors, taking care to point out the individual referred to, so as to prevent the possibility of a mistake.

The women were more amusing. The tattered finery that they wore was the finest that I had ever seen. They were like moulting parrots. Most of them had come very badly out of the operation, only a shred of brilliant red or green surviving of all their drapery, but they gathered their rags about them with the affected grace of a Parisienne, and throwing glances behind them of bewildering fascination, walked off with the peacock gait that gave distinction to the minuet of the *ancien régime*.

And all this grandeur and grace was the centre of such parrot cackle as could only be paralleled by the cage labelled *Raptores* in an aviary at feeding time. French shrugs, French gesticulations—elbows close to the sides and palms upturned to the skies—all that is caricaturable in French manners was caricatured here, and with an air of pride and a consciousness of dignity that added immeasurably to the effect of the whole.

My companion photographed some of the groups, taking care to ask their leave with due humility. They granted her request, condescendingly, conscious of granting a favour, and then they posed themselves, each of them asserting a right to appear in the front rank. After a dignified remonstrance—a contemptuous word or two, with a shrug, a horrible suspicion seemed to take hold of those in the modest background, that they were to be cut out of the picture. Acting on the impulse of

the moment they tried to overlap those in the foreground, and Miss Crofton was adroit enough to take her picture of the lot in the various attitudes which the situation of the moment had precipitated.

She should have waited a little longer : another situation had been evolved out of the simple elements that had interested us, and it was even more dramatic than the first. In it the overlapping process was completed, and two bundles of gorgeous rags were rolling in the capacious gutter, and the air was dark with flying wool.

We hurried on in search of a photographer who would undertake to develop three rolls of films by the time the steamer should make the voyage to the island of St. Thomas and return to Martinique, and we had no trouble in finding the studio ; only the photographer shrugged his shoulders and said that his hands were so full of profitable work he must decline the contract. But there were other photographers—of a sort—in St. Pierre, who might perhaps be able to oblige Madame and Monsieur. He would not go so far as to give us the address of any of the others—in fact, now that he came to think of it, he did not know the address of any of them. He was very sorry.

We went down the steep stairs from his studio, and into the blinding sunshine of the street.

“ I shall find one of these photographers if I have to send a bellman round to proclaim that we are in search of him,” said Miss Crofton.

I ventured to suggest that our time might be much more profitably spent in climbing Mont Pelée ; but my companion had made up her mind ; she would find a photographer.

We strolled down the street and on to the next, which contained several houses of importance—some of them

even with small gardens attached. On the sunny side I saw a shop of great dimensions, and in the window there was a show-card announcing the sale of a superior *Crème de Cacao*—a startling liqueur of which I had heard a good deal. We entered the place and bought some bottles, and finding the proprietor and his wife very polite, I ventured to enquire for a photographer. The former at once mentioned the name of the man to whom we had already been, but on asking for another, the lady quite glibly said that there was an Englishman who was, she had heard, an excellent photographer, but he preferred working only at landscapes ; he had travelled all over the island taking views of every spot worthy of notice. Some of them were, she said, magnificent. Of course, if we desired portraits——

But we had no desire for portraits, we assured her. We wanted something much simpler ; and would she have the great kindness to give us the Englishman's address ?

She was quite pleased to do so. The gentleman's name was Meester Brown, she said ; and from the door she was good enough to point out the turn we should take to reach his studio.

“ We shall bless the whole family of Brown—I wonder does he insist on a final e—if he undertakes to do our developments,” said my companion.

We found the studio of Englishman Brown without difficulty. It was a small affair on the outskirts of the town, and as it was built on a slope it was reached from the road by a flight of rough stone steps.

A table stood at one part of the little verandah in the shade of a large mango tree ; and at the table a man was standing with his back to us, doing something with a full-plate printing frame.

Miss Crofton said “ Good morning,” and the man

turned round with a start; his hands dropped. He stood there staring at her. She too had started. I saw that her face had become quite pale. It had been anything but pale before.

He looked as if he were about to say, as the men in the play do—usually in the last act—

“Is it possible? You here!”

But the man said nothing of the sort. He seemed to pull himself together. He bowed in the half-hearted way of an Englishman who knows that his name is Brown. And this time he looked at me. He was a man of perhaps forty years of age, rather distinguished looking, with a Vandyck beard, slightly grey. His hair was still more grey.

“Good afternoon, sir,” he said. “Views of the island, I suppose. If you will have the kindness to step inside.”

I explained to him what was the object of our visit.

“I think I can manage to develop your films and have them ready for you by the time you return from St. Thomas,” said he. “Would you like to have any prints?”

I told him that I should like to have my two rolls printed, and then I turned to Miss Crofton and asked her if she would have prints also.

I perceived that she had lost all interest in the photograph question. Her thoughts had wandered. I could see by the way she looked at me that she had not heard my question.

“We would like prints of all,” I said to the man. “But please keep our developments separate.”

“Certainly,” he said. “Will you kindly let me have your name—your names?”

I gave him my name and waited for Miss Crofton to give hers. She did not speak. The photographer had written mine and paused with the pencil still on the

paper. He looked at me and not at Miss Crofton while he said in a low voice—

“All the films under the same name?”

“You would like yours kept separate, Miss Crofton?” said I.

I heard him give a little gasp when I spoke her name. The point of the pencil made a dab at the paper, like the pen of a self-registering aneroid.

“Yes—separate,” said Miss Crofton, her eyes fixed on the tips of her fingers.

“Very good, sir,” said the man in a business-like way, gumming a small label on each tin case containing the rolls, and giving a great deal of attention to the job.

I rose from the cane verandah seat, but Miss Crofton did not move. The photographer waited with the tin cases in his hand. He remarked that the weather was very fine.

“We would do well to make the most of our few hours ashore,” I said to Miss Crofton.

“Will you be kind enough to leave me here for a short time?” she said to me. “I am slightly—slightly—that is, I found the sun very hot coming up this road. I want to rest for a while. I shall be all right in half an hour—or better say an hour—that will give you plenty of time to see what there is to be seen.”

Of course I had known from the moment we came upon the verandah, that she and the man had met before; but I had no idea that they had been on terms of such intimacy as caused her to wish to have one hour with him at this time. I only demurred for a moment.

“Do you really feel faint?” I said. “If you do I can quite easily stay with you. I don’t mind the——”

“I’m quite well. Please leave me,” she said.

I glanced at her and then at the man. He it was who now was examining his finger tips.

"I shall call here for you in an hour—perhaps less," said I.

I went down the stone steps into the road.

When I looked up after walking on some little way, they were shaking hands. That meant that it took them quite three minutes to make up their minds to shake hands.

I wondered if I had come upon the real romance of the Caribbean—if neither the exquisite Miss Hope nor the puzzling Miss Ormsby was to be the heroine of the romance of the cruise, but this young woman who was no longer young, and who had more than once been referred to in my presence as sensible. I felt intensely interested in her and in this rencontre in so strange a place with a man on whom she had been on friendly terms at a former time. The man who called himself Brown was undoubtedly something beyond an ordinary commonplace photographer. He spoke well, making the mistakes customary to an Englishman who moves in good society. His calling me "sir" sounded funny. It had evidently been on terms of social equality that he and Miss Crofton had met—so much was certain; but what was to come of their meeting at this time?

I could not hazard a guess. I could only await the simultaneous development of the films and the situation.

I made enquiries and found that I could get some distance up Mont Pelée within an hour or an hour and a half; so I managed to hire a buggy with a fair pony and set out for my drive.

The road by which I was taken went straight across a narrow spine leading steeply up the hill—Mont Pelée was the sugar-loaf to the left of the two which stood above the town of St. Pierre—and then followed the windings of one of the many valleys which the force of old eruptions of the volcano had scored all up the slope to the crater.

It would be ridiculous to make an attempt to describe the vegetation which appeared to right and left. It was a tumult of growth—a Walpurgis-night riot of nature—beauty and grace dancing through the glen hand in hand with all that was grotesque and mad. Cabbage palms dominated the ridges of the valley. Cactuses stretched out stumpy arms like beggars exhibiting strange deformities of limb. Mango trees forced into curious uncouth attitudes as to their arms—some seeming to beckon on a traveller, others to menace his approach—were on every side. Here were great trees struggling in all the contortions of a death agony with the strangling creepers that circled up their stems and crawled out on their branches like hideous snakes. It seemed as if one could hear moans coming up through that weird valley—moans of a constant conflict being waged between the trees and the enemies in whose clutches they were writhing their life away. Down in the depths of the mountain gorge beneath us were tossed and tumbled the enormous crags which earthquakes had dislodged from above, or which volcanic eruptions had vomited forth red hot from the hell beneath the thin crust of the slope. Enormous forests of tree ferns and tall shrubs half hid the forms of the rocks of the ravine, and all up the slope opposite to where we were driving was a wilderness of bread-fruits, mangoes and bananas.

Above us rose the great cone of Mont Pelée, looming gloomily over a desolation of naked rocks of fantastic shape, their barrenness contrasting strangely with the splendid fertility of the ravine on the ridge of which we were travelling.

My driver seemed to have an ample knowledge of the mountain ways, for he had no hesitation in leaving the ordinary track and plunging into the dense undergrowth, cruising along with one wheel a foot or two below the

other, for perhaps a couple of hundred yards, and then twisting the machine about the base of a cliff before setting his unfortunate horse to climb a bank four or five feet high, and so on to a level stretch known only to himself. I am bound to say that this system of his was full of surprises. It was certainly unconventional, and it afforded me some of the finest glimpses I ever had of the island scenery—sugar-cane patches, graceful hillocks of brilliant green, long gorges, solemn and slumberous, losing themselves in a distance of utter blackness. And there above all was the tremendous cone of Pelée, that mount of mystery, and seemingly above it, the peak of St. Croix, crowned with a Calvary.

Getting out of the buggy when we came to a part that no horse in harness could climb, I went on foot along a narrow track for about half a mile. I had started on this track in the midst of a Paradise of flowering shrubs and sweet-scented nutmegs, but at the end of half a mile the vegetation suddenly ceased and the scene of isolation that came before my eyes startled me. I was looking across a long hollow to another ridge of a valley, and this hollow was as barren as if the iron harrow of a hurricane had scooped through it a few days before, only there was no sign that trees had ever been here—no débris of broken boughs. It was a scene in keeping with the mystery of Mont Pelée.

And while I stood on the ridge there came out of the dimness of the distance one of the strangest birds I ever saw—an enormous thing of uncouth flapping wings, and an abrupt tail; it had the head of a raven, but the beak of a parrot, and while I watched it, the thing alighted on a stone, not more than twenty yards from where I stood, and vanished in an instant in a most marvellous way. I afterwards learned that it is called the *diablot*, and that it makes a burrow in the mountain

side for its nest, and only goes out to catch fish in the bay at night.

A few months later, when the news came of the awful eruption of Mont Pelée and the destruction of St. Pierre, I could not but feel that there had been a certain premonition of such a catastrophe in the atmosphere of the mountain on the afternoon of my visit. I thought at the time that everything seemed weird to me only on account of what Professor Dugdale had said about the place. But I know that I felt inclined to ridicule his fantastic theory about Napoleon and Josephine, which indeed was the very height of absurdity.

I fancy that it would be quite possible, by analysing one's sensations, to show that those scenes in what was called inanimate nature which produce an impression of weirdness, contain some of those elements which in the earlier days of the world's history, men, or the primæval ancestors of man, were, with good reason, accustomed to dread. The sensation of weirdness and gloom produced by looking at a rocky landscape may be a survival of a knowledge of the dreadful convulsions of nature by which that rocky landscape was produced. It is easy enough to analyse our sensations when we look upon a picture of green pastures and still waters: such impressions of pleasure are a survival of those of a pastoral people to whose flocks and herds grass and water were essential. But what is the origin of the gloom that one feels in looking at one of Salvator Rosa's pictures of volcanic rocks? Is it due to primæval man's knowledge of the fact that wild animals lurked in such places, or is it asking too much of an unanalytical imagination to go back to a first cause—to go back to the days when earthquakes and volcanic eruptions were within the experience of all the dwellers on a rapidly cooling earth? Most sensations

are the result of instinct and instinct is the result of experience.

I talked at that time to several people in St. Pierre on the possibility of an eruption of Mont Pelée, but they all shrugged their shoulders at the notion of such an occurrence. Some of them had never heard that any eruption had ever taken place; with others it was a vague tradition: all agreed that another outbreak was impossible; and within three months every man of them had fallen a victim, with forty or fifty thousand other human beings, to the volcano. So far as I can gather the molten lava rolled down that valley by the side of which I had driven and walked. But for that matter rivers of fire must have flowed for hours down all the valleys, all rushing together upon the town at the foot of the mountains, and sweeping it out of existence.

CHAPTER XV.

Crème de Cacao—that was the theme of the conversation of our shipmates who had been ashore. The scenery was all very well, the people of St. Pierre were not without interest, the odour of the open drains would inflate a large-sized balloon—all these points were dwelt upon casually, but the virtues of Crème de Cacao constituted a topic that hummed round the dinner tables. The properties of the liqueur were within the range of every intelligence—even Major Heber had his views on Crème de Cacao.

No one had met with any adventure, only Mr. Sowerby had been bitten by a mosquito. Major Wingfield did not show any special emotion on being acquainted with this incident. Mrs. Krux seemed to be under the impression that he should have been at hand either to avert the disaster—assuming (which we did not) that it was a disaster—or to slay the monster mosquito as he had slain the snake earlier in the day. But Wingfield disclaimed any intention of making himself responsible for the destruction of everything noxious, and one person who heard him do so remarked that if he should change his mind he would do well to start upon the Bakers.

Then we had the story of the two Irishmen who came

out to Martinique and as there was only one vacant bed in the hotel, they both turned into it. During the night the mosquitoes were pretty lively, and they seemed to enjoy the flavour of the visitors, who, in consequence, were disposed to be restless, and in despair, drew the bed-clothes over their heads until they were at the point of suffocation. Putting his head out for a breath of air, one of the men saw some fireflies floating about the room.

"Tim, my man, we may as well give in at wanst : 'tis looking for us with lighted matches that they are," said he.

Mr. Burling had of course sampled many brands of mosquitoes in his time, but they had never sampled him. Mosquitoes will no more sting a man than will a wasp, he affirmed. But they get annoyed because people will not have faith in their friendliness. That is why they bite. For his own part, he had no quarrel with mosquitoes. When we heard that they had never bitten him we had a quarrel with the mosquitoes.

Steaming along in a night of wonderful moonlight under the lee of the high shore of the island of Dominica, I found myself in a deck-chair by the side of Miss Crofton. Coming on board with her from the island I had said nothing to her about her adventure—if meeting in that strange place with a man with whom she had been previously acquainted could be termed an adventure. On calling for her in my buggy I assumed, for politeness' sake, an air of concern for her health, and she told me that she had quite recovered from the effects of her sudden indisposition.

But I knew that she would tell me all that it was convenient that I should learn respecting Mr. Brown, photographer, and I was not mistaken. She sat in the moonlight for some time in silence, and there was a curious expression of wistful melancholy on her face—

a look of abstraction. I had an idea that she was thinking how best she might begin her story.

And she began it very simply.

"Of course you know that I wasn't unwell at the island, when I begged of you to leave me?" she said.

"Of course," I replied. "I had an idea that you had met the man before and that you wished to have a talk with him. Perhaps I was wrong."

"You were not wrong," she said. "At one time—ten years ago—I was engaged to be married to that very man. As a matter of fact, I do not consider that I ever ceased to be engaged to marry him, although I have not met him for ten years."

"I am not going to say that the world is very small, Miss Crofton," said I. "I am only going to say that the man is the luckiest in the world—he is luckier than he deserves to be, unless you had made up your mind that he should be kept in ignorance of your whereabouts."

"That was not my attitude in regard to him; it was his attitude in regard to me. He ran away and hid himself, first in South America, then at Martinique. He cut himself off from everyone. He was virtually as dead to every association of the past as if he had been buried in the grave. I never thought that I should see him again, and yet . . . oh, I now know that I had never given up hope. . . . But it was such a strange thing! What a chance it was that that man to whom we went at first refused to develop our films—that you should go into that store and make enquiries—that I should walk up those steps and suddenly find myself face to face with him—with him!"

"Everything hangs on another, and the string of all the incidents we call life. There is no incident in our life that stands alone; each is dependent on the others. I wonder what other incident led up to the incident of

his leaving England and burying himself in Martinique."

"It was his becoming engaged to marry me. You had an idea that he had done something criminal?"

"That is the usual motive for flight and burial."

"I daresay. You have never heard of a man's disappearing because he was too proud to marry a wealthy girl when he had not a penny of his own?"

"Never, I admit. But I have known cases of men without a penny coming to the conclusion that the only thing that remained for them to do was to marry a girl with a fortune and stay at home."

"His name is Beaumont—Hugh Beaumont. When I knew him first he was in the army—he was one of the best polo players. He could afford to have good ponies; his father made him a large allowance. That was when we met We were to be married in August. His father died in June, and instead of leaving a large fortune it was found that he had been insolvent for several years. Hugh had only the fortune that had been settled upon his mother, but when he heard that the bankruptcy of his father's business would bring ruin to many people, he at once handed over all that he possessed to the trustees. He only was ruined; all the creditors were paid in full."

"It was an honourable thing to do. Of course, the creditors did nothing for him: they grabbed his money and left him to look after himself, though they had doubtless made fortunes out of his father and had been content to run all the risks which being in business involves."

"He came to me, setting me free. I refused my freedom. I was my father's only child and we were well off. I told him that. He would not listen to me. 'I will never consent to live upon your fortune,' he said. Then I told him that I would be content to wait

until he had made a position for himself. 'What can I do?' he said. 'I am good for nothing except soldiering and I can make nothing out of that. I will not do you the injustice of asking you to waste your life waiting for me.' We parted without having come to any agreement. I still refused to accept the freedom that he offered to me; and he refused to agree to let me wait for him. . . . I never saw him again until to-day. He wrote to me—one letter—bidding me good-bye. If he had not resolved to go away and bury himself where he could never be found, he felt, he said, that he should yield to the temptation which I had placed in his way, and he should never respect himself again."

"And now?"

"He is unchanged. He has managed to make a livelihood out of his photography. He had a pittance of something like a hundred and fifty pounds a year, and he finds that the other hundred which he makes places him in comparative affluence in St. Pierre. But he is unchanged. So am I. Now I have told you all my little romance from the beginning to the end. You have played a part in the end of it yourself. When you drove up to the foot of those stone steps I knew that the end had come."

"I hope that it may have a happier ending than that," said I when Miss Crofton rose from her chair. The deck was almost deserted, for it was getting on for six bells. "I cannot bring myself to think that you will not receive your reward."

"Perhaps I have already received it," said she. "I wonder what is the real reward of constancy in love. I wonder if it has any truer reward than is to be found in the consciousness that your constancy is met by the constancy of one whom you love. Has love anything better in store for one than this? Good-night. You

are not one of those people who are disposed to laugh at an old maid's love romance."

"It is not laughter that is in my heart at this moment, I assure you," said I with her hand in mine. "No, it is not laughter. Good-night."

It was not laughter that was in her eyes. I saw that they were glistening in the moonlight. I think that it did her good to have a chance of confiding in someone, and I was glad that I was that someone. If it had not done her good why should the tears have come into her eyes?

"The pity of it—the pity of it!" I said, dropping her hand and looking across the space of dark blue water that separated us from the steep slope of Dominica.

"There is no pity of it," said she. "We are true to each other, and he has been true to the standard of honour which he set up for himself and which he has made the guide of his life. There is no pity of it. Good-night."

She went down the companion without another word, leaving me standing at the ship's side watching the approach to the roadstead of Roseau.

I felt sadder than I had done for a long time, in thinking upon all that Miss Crofton had just told me. It seemed such a waste. Ten years of a woman's life gone for nothing, and all because of a man's foolish sense of honour! That is what my first thought was. I felt quite impatient at the thought of that woman's life wasted. I remembered how, when I had first come to know her, I had been led to wonder how it was that she had never married. I could not believe that it was because men had failed to appreciate her nature—her charm of character—her sweetness of disposition. I thought that she might possibly be thirty-three years

of age, and I could not remember meeting a more attractive woman.

Now that I had come to know the secret of her remaining unmarried I knew that during the ten years that had passed, she must have been beloved by more than one man. There were, I knew, a good many men who would not regard her possession of a fortune as any barrier to their affection for her, even though they themselves did not possess a penny. She could not but have had many "offers," and she had rejected them all, though she did not know whether the man who had gone away from her was living or dead.

And yet, when she had come face to face with him at last, she had been unable to persuade him that he had been doing her a gross injustice ! I felt impatient when I thought of how he had made her suffer, in order that he himself might have the consciousness of being consistent with the ideal which he had set up to be the guide of his life !

I had no patience with the man—no sympathy with his pride ; because I could not forget the grey hairs which I had noticed curving about Miss Crofton's ears. He had had it in his power to make her happy, but the grey hairs had come to her and still she was apart from him.

And yet she was contented that things should go on as they had been going on. She had no word of rebuke for him. She had never felt for a moment that she had a need to forgive him for anything. Had anyone suggested to her that she had been forgiving, she would have said—

"What had I to forgive—a man for being true to himself ?"

I remained on deck thinking my thoughts, and being conscious all the time that I was full of bitterness in regard to the man whom I had seen at Martinique—a

certain feeling of envy for one who had been strong enough to act up to his ideal of what was demanded of a man—I remained on deck until the steamer had slid along the high coast of Dominica and our anchor was let go in the deep water only a few hundred yards from the town of Roseau.

Moonlight was over everything on land and sea. The hollows of the waves were of smooth rolled gold, and every wave that fell upon the shore broke itself into nuggets, gleaming and glistening among the pebbles of the sloping beach. The white walls of the houses were glorified and the commonest roof became as splendid as the roof of King Solomon's Temple, as Mr. Fraser would have said, if he had not taken the precaution to turn into his bunk some hours before. The lights of the town seemed unnecessary in such a blaze of moonlight, and the lanterns in some of the boats that surrounded the Mail Steamer were as faint as fireflies. So strong a light was over everything before one's eyes that every palm along the shore was clearly defined, and the steep and rocky slopes of the island seemed to be covered with a golden net-work for the ensnaring of the moonlight.

I did not think that it would be possible for me to see to greater advantage this beautiful picture of shore and sea—the sea of a dream swaying along a dreaming shore, and muffling the plunge of its waves lest their roar should break the slumberer's vision—so I made up my mind not to go ashore. I retreated as far as was possible from the whirl of the windlass—for there was cargo to be transferred to one of the lighters that came lumbering alongside—I knew that the thing was a tub and that its motion was lumbering; but in the mystery of the moonlight and the fascination of this night, it had all the aspect of the galley of Ulysses—this was when its

sail was spread : when its sail was lowered it was like the barge that bore the lily maid of Astolat down the river.

Watching the men working at the forehold, I tried to get the spirit of the West Indies into my spirit—I had found myself making the effort pretty frequently since I had first looked along the low shore of Barbados. I hoped to be able to inhale something of the atmosphere of these islands for supremacy in which Spain and France and Holland and England had contended for centuries.

What was there about these islands that made them to be regarded by the great nations of the world as a string of unmatched pearls, enriching the wearers beyond their fellows ? Almost every island was fought for in turn since Columbus brought upon them the curse of civilization as interpreted by Spain, with marginal notes added by the buccaneers ; but Dominica had more vicissitudes than any. Although there is a bay on the island where tradition has it that Prince Rupert found it convenient to anchor some of his ships when he was seeking adventure in the West Indies, it is not that gallant cavalier whose name is most closely associated with this island, but Rodney.

We can with difficulty realise what Rodney's victory over de Grasse on April 12th, 1782, meant to England. The American colonies had just been lost to us, and nearly all that we had previously won in the West Indies had gone to France. St. Kitts, Nevis, Montserrat, St. Vincent and Dominica were soon in the possession of the same power. Who was there that could avoid feeling that England's day was over ? To Rodney was entrusted the task of snatching the perishing prestige of his country from the deep where it lay gasping.

He had twelve ships of the line, and after putting into Barbados, he took them on to St. Lucia. De Grasse

was known to be at anchor at Martinique. He had been getting together a large fleet hoping to crown his conquests by the capture of Jamaica ; but the day that his flotilla weighed anchor at Martinique, Rodney set sail from St. Lucia, gave chase to the French fleet and got between the lines on the lee of Dominica—the cliffs at which I had been looking must have echoed to the roar of the guns of the great battle that took place—the greatest that these waters had ever known. The French admiral, Count de Grasse, fought his ships with steadiness and determination, but Rodney possessed brilliancy and originality in his methods, and no one can read the history of his commission—he had just escaped being sent to the Tower, and he had as many enemies in England as he had in France—without feeling that he fought the fight of a desperate man. He overwhelmed de Grasse's fleet, capturing whatever ships had survived the engagement, and receiving the admiral's sword.

Rodney saved England on that memorable day and his name will ever be the most prominent in the history of the English in the West Indies. From 1782 to 1807 the prosperity of the plantations surpassed all records of colonial possessions. Immense fortunes were made in every direction. Hundreds of ships were to be found in every roadstead, and the finest frigates in the navy were employed in convoy duty with the merchantmen of the Caribbean.

But the names of many other great sailors besides Rodney are associated with the story of the West Indies. Curiously enough, it was on account of the claims which Admiral Penn had against the Crown on account of his services in Jamaica, that Charles II. granted William Penn the tract of backwoods which he called Pennsylvania, when he had made his grant good by con-

ciliating the Indians. Then it cannot be forgotten that Nelson obtained most of his naval education in the West Indies, and that he married his wife at Nevis. I fancy that he was as a rule disinclined to include the latter incident among his most satisfactory conquests. Jervis is another good name in naval history that must be added to the honourable roll of Caribbean heroes. It is doubtful if the list will be largely added to in the future. It is scarcely conceivable that any nation should put us to the trouble of defending empty store-houses, and an annual deficit. Still it would be rash to prophesy a millennium in a region that was once the centre of a cyclone of battles. One should never call the interior of a volcano extinct so long as the interior of the globe is red-hot, and where battles have once raged battles may rage again. The working man may once more acquire a taste for rum, as he did during one year of great prosperity when Mr. Goschen was Chancellor of the Exchequer; and if rum were to become popular the West Indies would become prosperous.

It surprises a visitor to observe how the dry rot has entered into every industry connected with these islands; and yet it can scarcely be doubted that if a company were started with a capital of a million or so, it would, under proper management, pay a handsome dividend after a few years. Sugar-growing is about to be placed on a reasonable basis; hitherto it has been conducted on a hand to mouth principle—a fascinating one in the hands of children, but fatal for adults. And then what about preserved fruits? There are some millions of people at home hungering for jam, and anxious for something new in this way, and one of these islands might be made to grow as much fruit as would supply even an army in the field. I forget how many hundred thousand tons of jam were eaten during the

South African War. But one day I went into the principal shop in Kingston, Jamaica, and sampled some of their jams. Every one on the list was delicious—nothing made at home could approach the best which I tasted here. I asked the price, and found that it was eighteenpence a pound. It should be fourpence retail, to have any chance of competing with home-grown jam.

I asked how it came to be so dear ; but I was assured by the proprietor that it was singularly cheap, and that as a matter of fact he made nothing out of it. That is to say, one starts to bottle jam ; the fruit may be had for the asking, sugar is something like three halfpence a pound, labour is sixpence a day, and yet the profit on jam-making is nil !

It has been demonstrated that the banana trade, if carried on upon a business-like basis, can change an annual deficit into a splendid surplus. But the banana is only one fruit out of the fifty marketable fruits of the West Indies. The grape-fruit, for instance, is without an equal in flavour and those refreshing qualities which make a fruit popular. In England a single specimen costs from half-a-crown to five shillings. In some of the islands one can buy them at the rate of three for a penny. And yet the grape-fruit will stand a voyage better than a banana.

The tobacco question is more important. Everyone who is capable of pronouncing an opinion will admit that the best quality of Jamaica cigars is far above the average of Havana. It is not so good as the finest Havana ; but the finest Havana cost retail 150/- for a box of one hundred—there is, I believe, an "extra best" sold at 200/- —and the Jamaican costs 40/-

Cocoa and coffee can be grown in any quantity, as well as arrowroot, nutmegs and pepper. All that is needed to make the West Indies as prosperous as ever

is capital, and its expenditure in an intelligent way. Not capital to the extent of twenty or thirty thousand pounds, but to the extent of two or three millions.

Should this happy condition of things ever be brought about, the islands may be considered worth defending ; but just now the ports are in such a condition that a couple of second-class cruisers could capture half-a-dozen islands in the course of twenty-four hours.

And all these reflections and calculations are the result of standing on the bridge of the *Amazon*, on this night of supreme moonlight, watching the slope of Dominica, and hearing the slow wash of the waves along the beach of pebbles.

CHAPTER XVI.

The moon had sunk behind Guadaloupe when we anchored in the roadstead at that island. For a week there had been ringing through my memory Whittier's lines—

“ In the sunny Guadaloupe
A dark-hulled vessel lay,
With a crew that noted never
The nightfall nor the day.”

I learned the whole poem in my school days, and somehow I acquired from it as much feeling as I ever had for the romance of these islands—the wickedness of the Brethren of the Coast, the cruelties of the slave trade. Up to the time that I read that line,

“ In the sunny Guadaloupe,”

I had made up my mind to become a pirate: I had actually gone the length of buying what I thought was a cutlass, though it turned out to be an Algerian sword worth a whole stand of arms. But after reading Whittier, I came to the conclusion that I should spend my life in the suppression of the slave trade.

“ In the moonlit Guadaloupe——”

that was not at all the same thing. And it so happened that I never saw Guadaloupe with the sun upon it.

The effect of the moonlight on the slope of Guadaloupe

is very different from anything that I witnessed at Dominica. High over us towers a dark mountainous mass, of a velvety blackness, but the whole is outlined in silver against the sky. The moon, which is hidden behind a headland, has spread a silver embroidery over the ridge of rock—a narrow thread of white following the irregular curves and hollows and scallop-edges of the island so far as the eye can see. And now all the sky is not overflowing with moonlight. Above the highest ridge of the island a few stars are quivering out of a dark blue sky.

Three or four ships are in the roadstead, swinging at their moorings just as the ship of the blind crew swung in the poem. They are all dark-hulled, but I am inclined to think that the crews take a particular note of the nightfall as well as the day. Still it does not need an unusually powerful imagination to picture aboard any ship in the roadstead such a scene of horror as Whittier has painted in lurid colours, when the crew of the slaver were smitten with blindness. The story of what did actually take place aboard the slaver is in keeping with traditional West Indian horrors. It is surrounded by the lurid atmosphere of the islands—the atmosphere in whose languid breath the black flag was hardly unfurled sufficiently to display the device it bore of the skull and cross bones. In every story of these waters that has burnt itself into our memory, the black flag with the grimly grinning Death's head, floats. That is the ensign of the Caribbean.

I was asleep before the steamer had left Guadaloupe and when I awoke we were approaching Montserrat.

Some of my fellow-passengers who have just come on deck have not quite made up their minds what is the name of the island before us. It was Mr. Gilbertson who said that he was looking forward to a day at

Guadaloupe, as he had been at school with a boy who lived there. He wondered if poor old Jimmy Thompson—the youth's name was James Thompson : I am not sure that I am fully justified in spelling it with a p—was still alive. We ventured to give him a word of hope that Jimmy had not been so active a participator in the general decay of the West Indies as to make it impossible that he should be greeted once more by his old school-fellow. But when I alluded casually to the fact that we had anchored for a couple of hours during the night at the island home of Mr. Thompson, young Mr. Gilbertson assumed that I was trying to impose upon his credulity. He put on a cunning look and advised me to practise on someone more innocent than himself. It would not pay for the Royal Mail to skip an island ; and he had heard nothing through the night of Guadaloupe. If, however, he found that Guadaloupe had been omitted, he would claim to have a portion of his passage money refunded.

Captain Pellew, our dashing dragoon, erred in the other direction : he assumed that the steamer had called at two islands after leaving Dominica, so that the coast alongside which we were steering must be Antigua. There really was a considerable divergence of opinion amidships as to the identity of the island ; and no one liked to enquire of the officer of the watch. At last someone put a leading question on the subject to the Captain, and came back to us saying—

“ It is Montserrat.”

“ Who says so ?” enquired one of the group.

“ The Captain.”

“ Oh ! What does the Captain know about it ?” said Mr. Gilbertson.

The general idea that prevailed was that in cruising in this fashion the name of the station should be painted

up on a board of reasonable size, and the name of the next island should be called out as is done by the conductors on the "tubes," as soon as the steamer weighs anchor.

Curiously enough, I found that Montserrat was the name best known of all the islands to my fellow-passengers. Most of them showed a want of familiarity with some of the islands; with others they were vaguely acquainted, but everyone brightened up at the name Montserrat. It was the best advertised island in all the Antilles. Even Mr. Gilbertson had heard of it. But he was not sure whether it was celebrated for its pills or its cocoa. Was it worth a guinea a box, or was it grateful and comforting, he asked of me in confidence.

I gave it as my belief that Montserrat was nothing but a huge limekiln; but this was a mistake on my part, for friend Aytoun, the Scot, came up to me a little later, and asked me what grounds I had for referring to it in that way: for his part, he said, without professing any particular knowledge of geology, he must say that he was unable to discover the least trace of limestone in any formation of the cliffs, and his binoculars were exceedingly good.

Two days later he explained to me that he thought it possible that I had been making an allusion to the limes of Montserrat; if so, I should have said limes and not lime.

Some of us went ashore for a couple of hours, and I found that Montserrat more closely resembled of all the islands we had yet visited the West Indies of the old prints. We expected every minute to be met by a slave trader with a broad-leaved hat and white duck pantaloons. At the deepest part of the curve of the bay were some low buildings suggesting "factories." From a distance very few signs of life were apparent; the long

shore with its lines of palms was silent ; even the breaking waves seemed whispering " hush."

When we landed it was without any risk of being torn to pieces by wild negroes such as we had run at Barbados and Martinique. Everyone here was decorous. The only thing that astonished us was to see some negro women striding along carrying huge baskets of "washing" on their heads. Whose washing it could be, goodness knows. It seemed to us that one basketful would be enough for the whole of this island.

I strolled up the long street of the little town and found that it contained, in addition to the usual negro cabins, several well-built houses, and one general store that would have done credit to any English village. The proprietor had hardly any colour : he was more than courteous, and although I made only a few insignificant purchases, he begged me to wait for a short time until he got some flowers for me. He presented me with quite a fine bouquet of roses and alamander.

I found that the people here are extremely proud of their last hurricane. They refer to it just as some towns refer to a Royal visit. They convey to one the idea that they feel that the visit from a first-class hurricane confers great social distinction upon them. The course of the Royal progress made by their visitor some years ago is easily discernible. It cut its way across the island as a snow plough forces its share through the snow. Down the slope across the town and down to the very water's edge one can see the broad band of its devastation. Trees were uprooted by the thousand and whirled through the air like straws. The lime juice factories were laid level with the ground. A church was destroyed and another was unroofed. Stones weighing half a ton were whisked away from their original resting place, and while the fury of the hurricane lasted the air must have

been thick with zinc roofs. They seem to have been flying about like crows at sunset. My friendly merchant showed me buried in the wooden pillar of his verandah, a piece of zinc about three inches across at its broadest part. It was a portion of a roof, and it was sunken quite two inches into the woodwork, so firmly that it could not be removed unless the wood were to be cut away on each side of the incision. I have seen queer things done by wind and waves in various parts of the world, but nothing queerer than this freak of the Montserrat hurricane.

I had heard that on this island one might come upon many of the inhabitants pronouncing their words with an Irish accent. I made it a point to ask questions of everyone whom I met, but I was not fortunate enough to detect a trace of anything beyond the pure negro. The kindly store-keeper spoke English so correctly as to lead me to feel sure that he must have been of Irish descent ; but he knew nothing of this himself.

I should mention that this gentleman, in giving me an account of the hurricane, stated that the most curious result of the visitation was that the course of the prevailing wind on the island had completely changed. Before the hurricane the prevailing wind for certainly ten months of the year was something like S.E., I think he said ; but since then the prevailing wind was N.E. I will not be positive as to the exact direction in either case, but I know that the divergence which he mentioned was quite as great as I have put it.

Our anchor was up before lunch and we were steaming for Antigua before some people had made up their minds what was the name of the island which we had just visited.

The Krux family and Miss Hope had gone ashore at Montserrat, but Major Wingfield, although he had acknowledged to me that he was greatly interested in

lime juice, did not leave the steamer. Mrs. Heber thoughtfully suggested the possibility of snakes being rampant at Montserrat, making it imperative that he should go ashore ; but he let her talk on ; and she told me in confidence that, after all, she did not think that he was in earnest.

The fact was that, since he had been the hero of the snake adventure at St. Lucia, Wingfield, so far from acting as most people predicted that he would in regard to the Krux group, had studiously avoided them. He made one enquiry respecting the health of Mrs. Krux, but that was all. He read a novel on his deck-chair for an hour and then went on the bridge for an hour ; but in spite of the fact that the chair on one side of Miss Hope was vacant and inviting, he never sought to occupy it ; and when he might reasonably have been expected to go ashore at Montserrat—just to make it all right with the snakes, someone said—he had remained aboard the steamer.

It was the same way between Montserrat and Antigua. Once more there was a vacant chair beside Miss Hope and once again it continued vacant.

People nudged one another, and I was invited to arbitrate on the delicate question as to whether or not he had sustained a rebuff in the Krux quarter.

But before the outline of Antigua became visible I was assured (in confidence) that Major Wingfield had seized the opportune moment when Mrs. Krux was off duty the previous afternoon to propose to Ethel Hope, and he had been ignominiously rejected.

Half an hour later I was told (in a whisper) that the snake story at St. Lucia was all a fabrication. Mrs. Krux had swooned away on seeing Major Wingfield with his arm round Miss Hope's waist on the road to Government House.

I did not think it at all generous of young Mr. Sale—he it was that had changed his route—to be jubilant and jocular when acquainting me with Wingfield's rebuff. It was this same youth who had affirmed that on the strength of having played the part of a circus Perseus to Miss Hope's fully-draped Andromeda, Wingfield would never leave her side for the rest of the voyage ; but he had forgotten this ; and that was why I acted as a villain in regard to this young man, urging him with Iago-like cunning of innuendo and significant hints, to take his courage in both hands and seat himself beside the girl—it would be for the first time. With diabolical ingenuity I pointed out to him how Major Wingfield had carried all before him, up to a certain point, and with Macchiavellian craft I suggested that what Wingfield had done anyone else could do, with a moderate share of luck.

I so worked upon this simple-minded youth that he went down to his cabin, put on a clean collar and a tie of tropical blue, made up in the knot of the wild sea dog, and in view of all the other passengers, walked boldly up to the vacant chair next to Miss Hope, and threw himself into it, with the nonchalance of a man of fashion. But at this critical point his courage failed him. He had been wound up to go thus far and no farther. He had not even so much left as would permit of his addressing Miss Hope. He simply sat there looking out straight before him.

Miss Hope went on turning over the leaves of her drawing-book, quite unconscious of his presence. Her book was one given over exclusively to the illustration of the artistic ideals of her friends ; and in order that uniformity might be observed in this record, she had made it a rule that only one ideal should be defined, and this definition was to take the form of a pig done in outline.

On every page the ideal pig of one of her friends wallowed or appeared rampant, couchant, or dormant, according to the promptings of the imagination of the illustrator, whose eyes were shut. Some pigs had the tails of Pomeranian dogs, others had the tails of cows. A few had eyes between their shoulders, and as many more had eyes in the centre of their bodies. It did not matter. Every record brought back sweet memories to the girl, not necessarily connected with artistic endeavour; and she was quite unconscious of the existence of the youth who had come beside her, and who sat there looking very ill at ease.

But the rest of the passengers who were on deck were not equally unconscious; and the young man found himself the centre of much interested observation. He had walked along the deck to that chair with such an air of determination, that it seemed impossible that he should suddenly become unnerved. They waited for him to do something—to begin to talk to the girl or to throw himself at her feet—to do something definite like that; and when he only responded to the interest which they took in him by staring straight out before him, people began to smile, and where proximity permitted, to nudge one another. He must have seen the nudges—some of them were so pronounced as to be almost audible. Still he remained with that fixed look upon his face—the look of one who is mesmerized and making a fool of himself, but who is unable to release himself from the spell.

Suddenly Miss Hope closed her artistic treasury and using the back of it as a desk, began to write a letter to be posted at Antigua. She had got to the end of the second page before the unhappy young man had sufficiently recovered from the strain put upon him in his attempt to act in a cutting-out expedition, in accordance with the traditions of West Indian romance.

But having recovered, he acted with promptitude. He got upon his feet and walked straight for the companion.

He went into his cabin and did not appear on deck for the rest of the afternoon.

An hour after his disappearance, however, Mr. Burling was seen to lean over the side of the steamer gesticulating strongly as it seemed to someone in the water.

"Go back—go back!" he shouted, apparently to the swimmer. "Go back while you have a chance!"

His vehemence alarmed us. Several of us ran across the deck and looked over the bulwarks. There we saw the head of the young man projecting beyond the line of his port-hole. He was taking the air in this fashion, probably feeling his cabin a little stuffy, and as he was looking down and not up, he had failed to see the gesticulations of Mr. Burling, and he had no idea that the warnings were addressed to him.

The young man was once more the centre of attention, and even Miss Hope looked over the side and down to where his head bulged out from the iron side of the steamer.

Mr. Burling called loudly for a steward and when one came he despatched the man to the cabin of the youth to force him to draw in his head.

"Don't leave his cabin until he has done it," he cried. "I only hope to heaven that it is not too late."

The steward was not absolutely certain that no joke was being played off on him. He demurred. Anyone could see that he felt that the coercion of a passenger who had a mind to look out of his port was not within the scope of his duties.

"The man may be strangled while that fool waits here," cried Mr. Burling. "What is the number of the cabin?—take me to it," he added, making haste to reach the companion, the steward following more leisurely.

We all laughed, and looked down the side of the steamer. The youth's head still bulged out from the glass rim of the port. But even while we watched it, it was suddenly withdrawn. We could hear the sound of voices coming through the open space where the head had been. We laughed.

"I can't for the life of me see why a chap shouldn't be allowed to look out of his port if he chooses," remarked someone.

"Can't you understand," said another, "that if we were to meet a vessel that wanted to cut it very fine passing us, the chap who puts his head out might be decapitated?"

"It looks jolly like as if de Rougemont Ananias had lost his head already," said a third.

At this point Mr. Burling came on deck again. He was wiping his forehead.

"I believe that I was just in the nick of time," he said in self-congratulatory tones.

"That was rather a pity, wasn't it?" said a bystander.

"Don't talk that way; you don't know what a turn it gave me to see that young idiot's head outside the rim of his port," said Burling.

"I suppose it did look a bit like the muzzle of an obsolete thirty-two pounder looking out of a gun port," said someone else.

"I shall never forget the day when the same thing happened aboard a steamer on which I sailed between Rangoon and Australia," said Mr. Burling solemnly. "A young fellow—he was in the Indian Civil Service and was making the voyage for his health—was fool enough to thrust his head through the rim of his cabin port, and when he had done so he found that he could not withdraw it. You see, his head was a tight fit, but by twisting it about, he just managed to get it through. It is one thing,

however, to get your head out of a hole and quite another to get it back. So that unfortunate man found. He called for help, and the captain, the surgeon, the purser, the chief engineer and the ship's carpenter all tried to work his head back. It was all no use. They poured a gallon or two of the purest lubricating oil over it—they twisted him round and round like a corkscrew; but all to no purpose. The sun sank, a ball of fire, into the crimson waters; but the man's head still remained on the wrong side of the port. They lowered food to him and he ate it to keep up his strength. They lowered a hat to him lest he should contract a chill; and the captain gave orders to the chief engineer to cut away the plate out of the steamer's side in the morning. It was the only way they saw of saving the man's life. Unfortunately when the morning came it was too late. Shortly after midnight we heard the poor fellow shriek out—a stifled shriek—I was on deck at the time talking to the chief officer, and I rushed to the side. Alas! all that I saw was the long ivory blade of an enormous sword-fish, and it was crimson to the hilt—I mean to the snout. I rushed down to the cabin. The poor fellow's body lay on the floor of his berth; but his head—it was not at that side of the port. The sword-fish, seeing it projecting, had shorn it off as clean as if it had been done by an executioner on Tower Hill. Can you wonder now that when I see a man putting his head through his port, I feel queer?"

There was a long silence before someone said—

"I think I'll have a cocktail."

"And I," said another; "well, I think I'll have a cock and bull tale."

There was a drizzling of laughter, and when it had passed away, Mr. Burling said—

"There are some chaps who, if they hear of any ex-

perience outside their own limited range, make a point of doubting it."

I sympathised with him, and told him of a friend of mine who had a pet sword-fish and taught it the complete sword exercise. At the word, he would "draw," "slope," "carry," and "return" with the utmost precision.

There was a sudden breaking up of our group.

CHAPTER XVII.

The roadstead of St. John, Antigua, at the west of the island, affords a safe though somewhat shallow anchorage within a few miles of the shore. The mail steamer anchors in sand not far within the low headlands at the entrance to the harbour, and somewhat closer to the eastern than to the western point. There is nothing imposing in the panorama that unrolls itself while soundings are being taken. The shoreway on one side is merely undulating. Sand hills, covered with that indefinite form of vegetation known as scrub, slope gently down to the sea and end in yellow crescents of sand with scarcely a fleck of foam to mark the breaking of the low waves. Far away, where the two shores meet, the little town slumbers in the afternoon air, as doth every island-town that I have yet seen in these waters, "in which it seemeth always afternoon." A glimpse of church towers, the chimney of a factory, the suggestion of what might have once been a fort bristling with guns—these are the ordinary incidents of the approach to a West India island-town, and they are not wanting during our half-hour run in the launch from the steamer to the little wharf.

Three little bays are on our right, with scrubby slopes beyond, and when we approach the masonry that was once a fort we perceive that it retains its guns. They

lie as abject and awkward as negroes in the sun—a rusty muzzle gapes foolishly to seaward, suggesting an actor who has forgotten his words ; another yawns in the other direction, and in front of the aperture a friendly palm projects an apologetic frond ; a third has dropped drunkenly from its rotten carriage and lies in shocking unconsciousness half sunk in the sand. But piracy is obsolete. The fort is a ruin. The weapons are not worth carrying away. There they will lie till the rust reduces the tubes to the thickness of tin, and then, perhaps, the Chinese Government may make an offer for them. Further on, where the channel narrows, is another building, also founded on a rock. We learn that it is a lunatic asylum. This building is in thorough repair. There seems no likelihood of its becoming an object of mouldering interest : there is nothing obsolete in lunacy.

The channel still narrows, and we find ourselves passing under the bows of a barque of four hundred tons discharging deals. This looks like business ; and so it is, for we learn that huts are in course of erection for some thousands of Boer prisoners, and Antigua has not been so overwhelmed with work for years—in fact, not since the great hurricane of a few years ago, when it was necessary for Sir George Melville, the Colonial Secretary, to make arrangement for the provisioning of fifteen thousand people within twelve hours—a feat which was triumphantly accomplished.

The fresh influx of business just now is also due to the hospitable intentions of the Government, for the coming Boer guests must be fed as well as lodged, and I subsequently learned from a store-keeper in the town that true British hospitality is to be shown to the new visitors ; the fact being that, though for half a century flour of a certain degree of fineness has been thought good enough

for the households of Governor-Generals, Colonial Secretaries, and even for their private secretaries, it has been found that to meet the requirements of the fastidious Boer palate, a much finer quality is necessary; consequently a consignment of the "extra superfine" is at the point of arriving at the island for the prisoners! This statement I was at the pains to verify; so that it can easily be believed that the general population of English exiles who have borne the burden and heat of the perpetual Midsummer Day of Colonial Office indifference, have had their spirits raised by the hope of being able to catch the crumbs that fall from the captives' table. Recalling my experience of Boer hospitality, which took the form of unbruised mealies and odorous biltong, in the old days in South Africa, I could not but smile. If the Boers had ever reached the island of Antigua, they would never have left it.

That the High Street of the City of St. John is properly so called, one begins to realise after one has gone for a few hundred yards up the slope on which it is built. It is "high"; in fact, "gamey," for to right and left of the chief thoroughfare are avenues of huts mainly inhabited by the negro population, and now and again a whiff of the choicest "*bouquet d'Afrique*" dwells on the breeze. But, on the whole, the High Street has about it all the repose of a self-respecting suburb, with rates verging on seven shillings in the pound—say, Brixton or Crouch End. The villas are minimised by ten diameters, and the garden patches are few; only at intervals one comes on a group of cocoanut palms twenty or thirty feet high, and an occasional cactus of a dusty green. Glancing through the open jalousies we got frequent glimpses of patches of emerald, surrounding trees which I took to be mangoes. That glimpse of green was pathetic

enough for me. I knew that it is nightly the centre of a little group of bronzed exiles who talk of "home" by the hour—home, with the sound of the tree lizards shrilling through the sultry air, beneath strange constellations and a lop-sided Great Bear pointing derisively to the Pole Star a few degrees above the horizon.

Further on the sound of a billiard ball clicks through the green jalousies of a low building as neat as neat can be, and we find ourselves in the billiard-room of the club, with cocktails flying through the air as thick as pheasants in a successful battue. The cocktail is to be accepted with caution. Like the pheasant, it is apt to leave the impression of a rocket when it passes. But it is, we are assured, medicinal, and it certainly tastes like an apothecary's shop in midsummer. I believe that a cocktail should be accepted in serial form, and without illustrations.

Within the cool depths of a cane chair it is pleasant to hear more exile chat—to recall with these country members of a Piccadilly club, the incidents of a billiard tournament fought out long ago, and long ago forgotten even by the victor. As a matter of course the approaching Boer is talked about in exile circles with enthusiasm. The topic represents in this village, presided over by a Lieutenant-Governor (with the title of His Excellency), the new play of the London dinner party, or the coming circus of the English village. Ships have been arriving with wood for the huts. Sapper chiefs have been slaking their thirst with lime—the native lime that assimilates so well with Apollinaris—within these walls for hours daily, discussing interminable details. On one of the billiard-room chairs at this moment lies a dumpy level and folded tripod—usually the pioneers of a prospectus, but in this place the

symbols of the sovereignty of a paternal—a maternal Government.

“Is it possible that so simple a matter as the housing of a couple of thousand Boers can create so great a fuss?” I enquired, for that dumpy level had about it the menacing aspect of a machine-gun.

“Come and see,” said one of the exiles. I went and what I saw filled me with admiration.

We walked past Government House—a very suitable residence for a village Governor-General with a taste for tropical botany—and up a slightly hilly road, leading to a small plateau, with a bandstand and the brevet rank of “park”—on for a few hundred yards to a cricket ground, as well kept as Lord’s, and more picturesque (if that were possible), for the cocoanut palms and flaming flamingo hibiscus of St. John are beyond the dreams of St. John’s Wood.

A few hundred yards further, still ascending, and we are led to a splendid plateau of irregular surfaces, thickly overgrown with scrub, not tawny, but green, and here are to be found the first signs of a new occupation of the island.

Stacks of timber stand to right and left of a long building, which we learn is the island prison, and projecting just beyond the face of a small mound is a roof. In a few minutes we come to six huts that have already been erected—long, spacious buildings, fixed on concrete blocks, each with a broad verandah, to prevent the home-sick Boer from forgetting his native stoep. To call the huts huts would be absurd: in the catalogue of a house agent of the least amount of imagination they would figure as “highly-desirable bungalow residences”—a West End agent would term them *bijou*, and ask a high rent for the worst of the street.

A little further to the north, preparations are also being made for the accommodation of an English regiment to act as guards of the prisoners when they arrive ; but of course it is not to be expected that the " most favoured nation " clause in the contractors' instructions should apply to these guards—they will have to be contented with ordinary barrack accommodation.

The plateau on which the first camp was to be erected is certainly the most picturesque in the island. The panorama which unfolds itself in every direction before our eyes is impressive. Behind us where we stand and far beneath is the little town of St. John, touching the bluest bit of sea that ever glistened beneath a Vesper sun. Further to the north the cool sea stretches, and is only partly concealed by one of the mounds close at hand. All the space from the northern shore to the central plateau is broken up in patches of olive and green—scrub and sugar-cane—most grateful to the eye. Then far away to the east we have a picture of undulating valleys dwindling into the distance, where a hollow in the shore-cliffs twenty miles away, gives another grateful glimpse of silver sea. From this quarter a breeze is blowing, soft beyond expression, balmy beyond imagination. The highest hills are those to the south-west, and they are full of light and colour, though eight miles away.

Assuredly if the Boers had ever reached the island they would never have left it, and I, for one, believe that their occupation would have had a better effect upon the West Indies than had the occupation of the islands by any of the other illustrious exiles in the port.

We returned to a delightful repast at an official residence, and had time to look in at the Cathedral—an immense church built at the top of the hill beyond the High Street, surrounded by palm trees, and the

graves of gallant men who died serving their country. One soon learns why there are so many palms in the West Indies. They are for the heroes who have given their lives for their land, whether they were soldiers or sailors or civil administrators.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The passage between Antigua and the islands of Nevis and St. Kitts occupies only a few hours' steaming at the gentle pace set up by the Royal Mail. For the greater part of the time we seemed to be sailing on a great inland lake. On our starboard side towered a long range of irregular hills, indented by small bays, and broken up by great valleys, all revelling in the pansy-purple of an exquisite twilight. But in a brief space there came about one of the most marvellous changes of colour that I have ever seen. It was as if it had been brought about by the dropping of one curtain and the raising of another. The distant coast of St. Kitts on the port side, which before had been of a misty grey, had now become delicately pink, and quite unreal—more unsubstantial than a mist. It seemed of the transparency of gauze permeated with pink. The sea was of the deepest blue, but the sky above us and spreading on to the east was green—the faint green of an opal in places, and of a turquoise in others. In the tenderest gradations it dwindled into saffron about the west. Only here and there a thread or two of orange appeared, and a patch of pink, floating like a rose petal blown upon a grassy lawn.

On through this mysterious sea and this atmosphere of mystery we stole, conscious of no change of

colour—no deepening of the blue beneath us—no dwindling of the opal green around us—until we became aware of a white moon looking at us through the saffron gauze. The face of the moon was white as a bleached leaf. We seemed to be moving through the unreal scenery—the unreal atmosphere of a dream ; and what was strangest was the lingering of the lights and the tints about us. There was no change in the sky or in the water ; although the figures of the people on our decks had become shadowy.

Then the moon grew more distinct, and the colours above us seemed, not to drift away to the west or to the east but simply to recede—to be caught up into the heaven itself. We felt that it had been given to us to see in one hour all that Turner had seen in a lifetime—to have a glimpse of the dream of Dante Rossetti when he wrote—

“ Between the sun and the moon, a mystery,”

.

We had no business to detain us at Nevis, and I felt sorry for this. The island is one of the most interesting in this archipelago ; for it was a hundred and fifty years ago the typical planter's island—parent of the colonies—the most aristocratic of all. There was a society here whose leaders gave social laws to the other islands, and endeavoured to enforce their observance—rather a difficult matter I should imagine, for, sailing in these waters to-day, one becomes impressed with the isolation of each community. We scarcely ever caught sight of a ship going from island to island. Still, during the eighteenth century and the first twenty or thirty years of the nineteenth, these waters were crowded with shipping, and almost every planter had his own smacks and schooners, so that people could go from Nevis to

Antigua or St. Kitts to a dinner-party or a ball arranged after the true Vauxhall or Ranelagh mode.

I am sure that Miss Gertrude Atherton gives in "The Conqueror" a faithful glimpse of the planter's life at Nevis and St. Kitts during the middle of the eighteenth century, when her hero, Alexander Hamilton, lived in these islands. But from what this delightful writer tells us respecting the various failures of Hamilton's father, it is quite clear that it was as easy to lose a fortune in sugar-cane in those days as it is to-day.

A certain additional interest attaches to Nevis in our eyes, through the incident of Nelson having married at this island the widow of one Dr. Nesbit. The entry of the marriage is to be seen in the register of the church where it was celebrated. Thus it is that the name of Hamilton is connected with this island—in the case of Nelson the connection is not so honourable as in that of Miss Atherton's "Conqueror."

We were away from Nevis and had crossed the channel to St. Kitts before the moon had risen high in the sky, and the moment that we dropped our anchor we began to realize the feelings of the honest merchantman when boarded by pirates. On the sides of the steamer, thick as barnacles, and possessing a good many of the qualities of the barnacle, swarmed scores of ill-looking ruffians, out of the night, wanting only pistols in their belts and cutlasses between their teeth to complete the illusion of their calling. They boarded us fore and aft, and practically took possession of our decks. Walking the plank seemed imminent, when happily one of the officers had his attention directed to the success of the boarding party. In sympathy with the best traditions of romance he leaped among the buccaneers single-handed and hurled them over the side into their boats, and the decks of the good old *Amazon* were free once more.

But such a menagerie of yelling, shrieking and squabbling as followed ! It seemed as if the monkey-house had invaded the parrot-house. Not a phrase either of vituperation or denunciation could we make out ; all was gibber and jabber—in bass and tenor and an infuriated falsetto—and the silver moonlight over all—and the phosphorescent glitter of the great rollers plunging along the mysterious coast in the distance !

By some means the negroes had heard that a passenger was disembarking at the island, and all this fuss—this attempted capture of the steamer, this mustering of the flotilla of boats—represented nothing more than a healthy business spirit to secure the contract for transporting his luggage to the shore.

I saw the man's luggage brought on deck. It consisted of two brown paper parcels, a bundle of soiled collars of an obsolete shape, and a Gladstone bag. The tumult of which these were the centre seemed quite out of proportion to the prize. I felt as did the Jew who threw his half-gnawed knuckle of pork overboard, when the tornado had been sent as a judgment on his indulgence in the forbidden—"it was a deal of fuss to make over a trifle."

But even after the passenger and his luggage had been swallowed up in the darkness, the noise of the niggers was continued, only reduced within the bounds of the decorum of the padded room, when a boat containing half-a-dozen minstrels came alongside. There was an orchestra of a fiddle, a tambourine and a whistle—one of those that go through the world prejudiced by never being named except in conjunction with their price, which happens to be one penny. This trio of instruments began to perform very creditably a symphony founded on "Soldiers of the Queen," and there was a

lull in the tumult to allow music-lovers to satiate themselves with the sweet strains.

Later on a banjo was produced from under a thwart, and a vocal duet was given to the night, with this accompaniment. An enthusiastic passenger threw a sixpence into the boat and asked for a "coon song." I take it for granted that the assessment of this species of composition was correct; though to my thinking it was rather excessive; but after a consultation, involving much pursing of the lips and a vast display of ivory, word was passed up that the negro melodists had never heard of a "coon song."

I thought a good deal better of them from that moment.

They gave us instead a curious entertainment which was exceedingly interesting to Professor Dugdale and other students of heredity. It was a monkey pantomime. One of the artists, who had plainly inherited a knowledge of many of the mannerisms of the jungle, crouched on all fours in the stern sheets of the boat and then worked his way forward, keeping up a continuous play with an imaginary tail and throwing himself into a number of attitudes—"distinctly reminiscent of arboreal antecedents," Professor Dugdale affirmed them to be. For half an hour he was as amusing as one of his brethren, collaterally descended from the same family tree, can be when tempted by nuts or by the illicit possession of a pair of pince-nez, or an ostrich feather hastily snatched from an unprotected hat.

A more natural performance I never saw—as a matter of fact it was just too natural to be altogether comfortable to the spectators; and Professor Dugdale said that the most remarkable part of it was that it was extremely unlikely that the performer had ever seen a monkey in all his life. Perhaps he had not, but I know that he had many opportunities of seeing some colourable

imitations of one. To make the illusion perfect he needed only the smallest amount of make-up.

In a few hours we had weighed anchor once more and were shaping our course through a lapis lazuli sea to St. Thomas, the Danish colony which was to mark the limits of our cruise round the northern islands. I felt that I for one should be glad of a few days' rest to enable me to assimilate something of the scenery through which we had passed—something of the atmosphere of these islands. It occurred to me that we were doing too much. Montserrat, Antigua, Nevis, and St. Kitts all since morning ! I began to be conscious of an attack of what I may perhaps be pardoned for calling scenic dyspepsia. I have had a corresponding feeling of excess when as a boy I partook of anything over two bottles of lemonade following anything over two ices. More recently a long day at the Academy has produced a corresponding impression, only mental—the impression produced by the lemonade was not a mental one. I believe that it is a recognized malady and is catalogued as "Academy headache."

I was not the only one aboard the *Amazon* who was suffering. While we were watching the disappearance of St. Kitts, Mr. Gilbertson came beside me, and I saw that he was troubled about something.

"I am so sorry to bother you," he said, "but I should be so much obliged if you would let me know what is the name of the last island that we have been to."

I told him that it was called St. Kitts.

"Are you quite sure?" he asked after a puzzled pause. "Well, I'm dashed ! I thought it was Nevis. Where does Nevis come in—if we passed it in the night it was a swindle. Now what islands did we really pass in the night ? I know that Dominica was one ; but I can't for the life of me remember the names of the others.

There are too many islands in the West Indies—that's what's the matter with them. And I hear that there are others farther south! Good Lord! The place is overcrowded with islands."

I agreed with him, and saw him safely through a green-lime squash to enable him to face another fortnight in the overcrowded Caribbean.

It was Mrs. Heber whom I found in the deck-chair next to mine an hour later, when a good many of our shipmates had gone to their cabins. The congested state of the Caribbean Sea gave Mrs. Heber little trouble. Like the youth suspected of heretical tendencies, she subscribed to thirty-nine islands—and would have subscribed to forty if necessary. She had not the least idea of the names of those that she had seen; and when I told her that we had yet to call at Borneo, Java and Anticosti, she said—

"Oh, really! But surely Anticosti was the name of the one that we visited before we came to the other two—or was it three? Yes, it was Anticosti."

"Not exactly," said I. "The one you are thinking of is Antigua."

"Oh, I thought that was short for Anticosti. People say Frisco nowadays when they mean San Francisco. The islands are lovely. Are there many more of them really?"

I thought of one Christopher Sly—old Sly's son of Burton Heath, whom Shakespeare created to voice a modern playgoer's idea of Shakespearian drama—

"'Tis a very excellent piece of work—would 't were done."

I contented myself by assuring her that Borneo was said to be a beautiful island and very large, and that I hoped she would find the Philippines attractive.

"I am sure that I shall: I like Americans," she

replied. "Cuba is the capital of the Philippines, is it not? It was captured by President Roosevelt during the war. By the way, I wanted to talk to you about some of our fellow-passengers."

I signified to her the delight that it would give me to hear anything to the detriment of a fellow-passenger. She hastened to assure me that she did not wish to arouse false hopes within me: she would give no guarantee that what she was about to say was to the detriment of anyone.

"Never mind," I said. "I am sure that I shall be interested even if you find it necessary to say nothing but what is good about anyone."

"I am not sure that it is altogether good," said she. "You shall judge. You have eaten of the Tree of Knowledge: you are in a position to judge between good and evil. The fact is that—that—well, I am sure that you must have seen how friendly Miss Croysdale and Mr. Conrad have become within the past few days."

"I am a poor hand at noticing these things," said I; "but if they have become friendly, where's the harm? Isn't there a proverb which says something about friendliness being next to godliness?"

"That's all very well; but if the girl allows herself to fall in love with a man about whom we know nothing——"

"But we know all about Conrad: he is one of the straightest bats in England and there's no better wicket-keeper."

"Of course if you choose to make fun of what you know to be a very serious thing you can go away. But I look on myself as in a measure the guardian—the temporary guardian—of Meta Croysdale, and if she should really allow herself to be carried away by this Mr. Conrad, I should never forgive myself."

Now, I really could not for the life of me see what the friendliness of Miss Croysdale and Mr. Conrad had to do with Mrs. Heber ; only of course I could not tell her so. What I had noticed with great interest was that Mr. Conrad had started by being extremely friendly with Mrs. Heber, and that he had lately transferred this extreme friendliness to Miss Croysdale.

"It would be very pleasant—I mean sad—very sad—if Miss Croysdale allowed herself to be carried away by Conrad ; but I don't think that either of them would lay the blame at your door, even if their present *rapprochement* were to end in marriage," said I.

"Oh, that is the easy-going way in which you look at all these affairs ; but thank heaven I am a woman," she cried. "You shrug your shoulders and pass on. You would not put out a hand to save a fellow-creature from—from——"

"From a happy marriage ?"

"Is there such a thing as a happy marriage ?"

"Ah, now you are going to talk about the feet of clay."

She became slightly irritated. I had no idea that she placed so high a value on the friendliness of Mr. Conrad.

"I am disappointed in you," she said. "I felt sure that you would see this matter with my eyes. Think of that girl—a very nice girl she is—she has no mother—she comes in all innocence—who is there to tell her that men—that even a good-looking young fellow like Mr. Conrad to be sure he may think that a little flirtation ah, it means so little to the man ! But should I not say a word of warning to her ? Should I not stretch out a hand to save her ? Do I not stand in the position of a mother to her—tell me that ?"

"If you feel that you do, you may be sure that you do," said I. "You are a very kind-hearted woman, my

dear Mrs. Heber. And I feel so flattered at your coming to consult with me that I have no hesitation in offering you my opinion, which is that if you feel yourself in the place of a mother, you should do what a good mother would do in the circumstances."

"And what would she do in the circumstances?"

"She would do nothing."

"That is a man's counsel. There is a cynical shrug of the shoulders in every word of it. Do nothing? I take it for granted that the girl is wealthy—she travels with her maid—six trunks—I think it would have been more discreet of her if she had engaged a companion—but she is undoubtedly wealthy—just the sort of girl that an unprincipled adventurer is on the look-out for. Just think of the risk in it all! And yet you can advise me to sit tight and do nothing. Of course I don't say that Mr. Conrad is an adventurer; still he is—a man."

"That last is all that a good mother in Philistia would take into account. He is a man and every man is a possible husband, and a possible husband is the best possible thing for a marriageable daughter."

"That is the generally accepted notion. I don't say that it is wrong. But I do say that it is the holding of such a theory that brings misery to so many girls. My mother married me when I was seventeen. I had four sisters—she was getting anxious about our future. I do not say that she had not the best intentions."

"And on the whole you have been very happy; now, have you not?"

"Well, I dare say. But is it not monstrous that before a girl can know anything of the world—anything of men and their ways, she should be sent into the slavery of marriage?"

"It is a very shocking way of attaining complete happiness."

"Complete happiness? I wonder if any woman knows what is meant by complete happiness?"

"I often wonder what she would do with it if she had it."

"She would cherish it—cherish it—cherish it!"

"No, she would look out for a man to share it with and she would cherish *him*. That's what she would do if it were possible for her to know perfect happiness apart from a man."

Mrs. Heber gave a scornful laugh, and with a protesting wave of a very shapely arm, walked away. When she had gone a few steps, she turned her head only with a very pleasant "Good-night."

I tried to impart to my response the same spirit as that which I had detected (I thought) in her attitude, but I was conscious of a tolerably complete failure, and so was she. She threw over her shoulder at me the pleasant little laugh of one who has got the better of another, and I felt sure that she would sleep soundly.

All that she had said quite interested me. Indeed I never had a chat with Mrs. Heber without feeling the better for it. She invariably—sometimes imperceptibly as well—led the conversation on to a higher level than that on which she found it. When people were talking politics and religion and things of that sort, she drew them on to talk or to hear her talk on the text of the Lonely Woman, or it might be, the Heart of a Girl. If one did not learn a great deal from her it was entirely one's own fault.

Just now I felt that what I had learned from her was that even a woman who is sure of her position as one who interests all men, may become piqued if any one man wavers in his allegiance to her. She who could, so to speak, keep a complete eleven fielding for her for days together was annoyed because a single wicket-

keeper had treated her with a less amount of attention than he had previously shown to her.

It certainly showed culpable carelessness on the part of young Conrad to pay attention to Miss Croysdale when Mrs. Heber was on deck, more especially as Mrs. Heber had taken up Miss Croysdale. I fancy that Mrs. Heber had a notion that I would give a hint or two to Conrad to the effect that his attitude in respect of the younger lady was causing remark, and indeed it may have been so: a man can never say exactly how much of a fool he seems in the eye of a woman. But whatever I may have seemed to so practised a person as Mrs. Heber, I rather thought that I could trust myself to refrain from giving even the vaguest hint to Conrad on the matter suggested by Mrs. Heber. If I sought to make him certain that I was a fool, I should do so through another channel.

But here was another incipient romance unfolding itself—a rose blossom of romance bursting into blossom, under my eyes. If many others were blooming in the same garden I should become embarrassed before long. It was too great a strain on any horticulturist to pay conscientious attention to so prolific a rosery.

Some consolation came to me from the reflection that the buds would become blossoms whether I paid attention to them or not.

CHAPTER XIX.

The next morning the *Amazon* steamed into the best harbour we had yet seen in the West Indies, and dropped anchor opposite the town of Charlotte Amalia, the capital of St. Thomas. Like Jerusalem, Edinburgh, Cork, and a few other great cities, Charlotte Amalia is built upon hills. The houses climb some distance up each of the three slopes which meet in the hollow of the bay, and one can see without much trouble that there is no better built town in any of the islands. Most of the houses visible from the ship are large and all have bright red roofs. There is a Swiss chalet look about some of them, but others are more palatial—more like a London suburban villa, which, I need scarcely say, is one of the most beautiful things that exist in architecture.

By far the most imposing object seen from the ship is a long red building some way up one of the slopes : it is, we learn, the prison. Its dimensions suggest an amount of criminality which inspires respect ; but alas ! our informant assures us that the people of the island have never been able to see their way to take full advantage of the privileges offered to them by the designer of the place. Its emptiness seems to be a constant reproach to the authorities just now ; but as it is taken for granted that the purchase of the island by the United States will be completed, they should not lose heart : with renewed

prosperity under the United States, a new wing may have to be added to the prison.

Another interesting building seen from the steamer takes the form of a turret attached to a villa high up on the slope. We are courteously informed that this is all that remains of the stronghold of the noted pirate who terrorized these waters under the name of Blackbeard. We are quite content to accept without demur any statement that tends to put us in touch with the good old days. Up to the present we have seen nothing among the islands to suggest the existence of one period of the industry which put thousands of pounds into the coffers of the publishers of romance—not necessarily pirated editions.

A cable's length from our vessel there is a floating coaling dock and a steamer of probably a thousand tons is being supplied in the usual style from some huge stacks. A Danish cruiser is at her moorings quite close to the shore; an American barque, and two smaller vessels are in the bay, but this represents the full tale of the shipping at this port where, a hundred and fifty years ago, when Alexander Hamilton landed, there were considerably over a hundred merchant ships!

Nothing tends more strongly to make us aware of the decay of these islands than such a record of past prosperity. Miss Atherton tells us in her fascinating biographical romance that when Hamilton landed at St. Thomas he found the streets crowded with people, all doing business from early morning till late at night—indeed it is hinted that there was no cessation of trade at the coming on of night. But when I sailed ashore in the ship's long boat, I had certainly no difficulty in walking through the streets. I was in no way inconvenienced by the traffic. On the little wharf there were about a dozen negroes, and strolling up from the landing

place to the principal street I met with as many more. The place seemed even more moribund than Montserrat. St. John, Antigua, was, by comparison, a great commercial centre.

But when I was turning out of the little square, where there is a small public garden, I found that I might have a choice of half-a-dozen buggies had I wished to explore the island. This was at last a sign of enterprise. The principal street contains several shops of enormous dimensions, but with no more stock than called for a tenth of their accommodation. I entered two or three to make some small purchases, and I am bound to say that I met with none but intelligent people behind the counters. They all spoke English—it seemed to me that they had never spoken any other language; all the trade announcements were in English; the only words of Danish that came under my notice were the names of the streets. I began to think that it was perhaps time that St. Thomas changed its flag.

That is the conclusion to which the people of Charlotte Amalia have come also. I never heard a saner view expressed on any "crisis" than that which was held by the majority of the inhabitants of the town with whom I conversed respecting the proposed sale of the island to the Americans. The name of St. Thomas is suggestive of doubt, but no one with whom I came in contact was dubious of the advantages likely to accrue from the transaction. At the same time no one seemed to cherish any illusions on the subject. It was never suggested that affluence might be the immediate result of the transfer. The consensus of opinion amounted to this: "We are a poor people; Denmark is a poor country, and cannot afford to keep a man-of-war in our harbour and a garrison at the fort. We think that to be under the flag of a rich country such as the United States is

certain to be to the advantage of the island eventually. Capital is sure to be brought here, and our industries will once more be placed on a paying basis. But it is with great regret that we find the change of flag to be necessary. We have the warmest affection for Denmark."

I made enquiry as to the effect already produced upon the trade of the island by the prospect of the transference. There is no Stock Exchange at Charlotte Amalia, so that I could not judge by reference to such a barometer ; but I learned that there had been a little speculating in land and house property, but scarcely any advance in prices had been shown.

In a word it may be said that, while it would be going too far to state that the people are enthusiastic at the prospect of becoming American citizens, it would not be going far enough to suggest that they are merely reconciled to the change.

Since my visit, however, the proposals for the transfer of the island have fallen through. There really never was any eagerness shown in the business. The States reckoned that it could get on for a while longer without St. Thomas, and Denmark felt that getting rid of St. Thomas was like selling her silver tea-spoons. As for the people of the island it may, I think, be taken for granted that they will bear up against the hardship of remaining unsold for another term of years.

Everywhere at St. Thomas I noticed the superiority of the negro population over that of any of the other islands. They are more civil and less self-assertive than any with which I came in contact. The women, too, are better dressed—not gaudily but neatly, and their packing-case houses are absolutely spotless ; so was the bed linen which I inspected at the invitation of a prominent inhabitant who gave me a great deal of information,

and begged of me to put some of the statements to the test. This same person also assured me that the real cause of the decay of West Indian sugar was the simplest one that could be imagined : it was neither more nor less than the indolence of all concerned in the manufacture. The sugar growers allowed their business to look after itself, he said ; they were content to work with their old machinery until it dropped to pieces, and they took to borrowing money on the crop before it was ready to cut. I have no reason to think that his information on this point was less accurate than that which he gave to me on other matters connected with the social economy of the West Indies.

I wondered if it was the borrowing powers of the planters of St. Thomas that made a Jewish cemetery a necessity on the island. But for that matter the Jews have for several centuries played an important part in the West Indies and on the Spanish Main. As soon as they were expelled from a European state numbers of them crossed the Atlantic. In Brazil they became a power, and in St. Thomas, so far as I can gather, they were the mainstay of the buccaneering industry. When a pirate ship put into the harbour richly laden with spoil, a Jew was always found ready to buy a portion of the plunder at his own valuation. It is not surprising in these circumstances that St. Thomas became the residence of many wealthy Hebrews.

Taking a buggy drive of three or four miles along the base of the highest slope I came upon the Hebrew cemetery, and also one for Gentiles of all faiths. Both seemed crowded : but my informant assured me with a sigh, that there had been a great falling off in the mortality during recent years, though there were some inhabitants who could recollect the former glories of the place when no day passed without its funeral.

Those were the good old days when Yellow Jack was the most important name in the West Indies.

What made the greatest change in the health of this island was the removal of a small shoal which prevented the free circulation of the water in the harbour. The engineering needed for the making of a free passage through what is called Water Island, was insignificant, but the effect which it had upon the sanitation of the place was extraordinary, and at present epidemics are unknown at St. Thomas.

This is the ideal pirate's island. One day I got a buggy and drove straight across the slope to the lagoon, and here for the first time I recognized the topography of the typical romance of buccaneering. For a mile or two we drove along an excellent road, and then gradually ascending, we got upon a river bed skirting one of the ninety large estates which were at one time being worked on the island. Higher up still we drove through a splendid avenue that somehow suggested the aromatics of an apothecary's shop—it was of turpentine trees. Further on we passed some plantations of sugar-cane; but the cane as treated here is good for nothing—children amuse themselves with it—that is all. On this road we came upon a Moravian school, standing in the middle of an untilled garden.

A gradual descent brought us to the Eastern side of the island, and we drove for a mile along a mango brake and suddenly came upon what seemed to me to be an inland lake. Here we found a couple of negroes in the worst boat that I had ever risked my life in since the days of my boyhood when anything that would float was accepted by me as a practicable vessel. We were rowed clear of the sandbank that formed one of the boundaries of the piece of water, and then we were in the lagoon.

Far away we could see the waves breaking upon the reef, but the water on which we were floating was calm and transparent as an emerald. Just where it began to be shallow pelicans by the score were fishing. On one side there was a mango brake and at the other the low point of the island, blue sky over it and blue waters trembling at its base. When we landed on the sand and the negro boatmen went before us clearing a track through the dense growth of mangoes with machetes, we could not but feel that we were at last on the shore of the pirate's romance. It was on just such a spot as this that Captain Kidd landed and buried his treasure. It was surely not far away from the island where Captain Flint—he is more real to us than Kidd or Morgan—buried his bar silver and pieces of eight, after killing the six men whom he had brought with him. I looked out to the reef, feeling sure that I should see the schooner *Walrus* keeping off and on waiting for the return of her captain, Darby Magraw fetching aft the rum to Mr. William Bones, probably with as much regularity as if the mate were Captain Flint himself.

The rough obelisk of rock which we reached after a tough fight with the mangoes—the result of a landslide or possibly of one of the many earthquakes to which St. Thomas has been subject—would certainly have made a most excellent bearing for anyone burying treasure. It seems to have been planted there especially for buccaneers of a thrifty nature.

But a much more useful pirates' lair is in Krom Bay on the Western shore of St. Thomas. We sailed there in the steamer's yawl one afternoon, making the passage between low islands of sand covered with scrub. A more perfect harbour for small vessels could not be imagined. The water is shallow but the anchorage is good and the bay is practically landlocked. Here in

the old days I have no doubt that many a piratical schooner lurked, its whereabouts being unknown to all the world outside this enchanting haven of high banks and groves of palm.

At the deepest part of the hollow of the little bay we found a depository of broken-up ships that completed its uncanny appearance. Here were old masts and spars by the dozen, coils of wire rope, chain hawsers, kedge anchors, ships' bells, binnacles, cooks' galleys and sidelights. The sloping white sand was strewn with these things, and under a group of the noblest cocoanut palms I ever saw, there were two deck-houses of different heights which apparently were occupied by the caretakers or the proprietor of these treasures—the job lots of Clarence's Dream.

To find oneself among these things at such a place was like being behind the scenes of a theatre where a piratical drama is in course of production. Nothing looked real. The palms had the appearance of being painted on canvas and "profiled," as the stage carpenters call the process of cutting-out, and the sky and sea were quite of a scene painter's blue. I learned that it was here that vessels were taken to be broken up when they had been condemned by the agent of Lloyds. I also learned that at one time it was quite possible to make a decent fortune by breaking up ships. In those days a ship that was "fully covered" had only to meet with a trifling accident to be condemned by some easy-going surveyor. The breaking-up process followed naturally and it is quite plain that whoso bought a sound and well-found ship at scrap price, made a pretty fair sum by the transaction. Now, however, the underwriters get a cablegram telling that a ship is disabled, and they send a responsible agent out to examine her by the next mail steamer. Thus it is that the breaking-up trade is

not what it was, and marine surveyors no longer make fortunes.

Krom Bay was the Execution Dock of the condemned ship, and these "lots" were the relics of the days when a pirate having flown the Jolly Roger for some years, joined the less exciting branch of the same profession and became a marine surveyor.

The sun sank while we wandered about the shore at this strange place. In the soft purple twilight the shrill metallic whistle of the tree lizards sounded from every part of the shore unceasingly. Every now and again a fish splashed out of the water. The brake was alight with fireflies and curious luminous beetles. Some of our party were driving back to the town, but I had made up my mind not to quit our boat, though the breeze was very light. With a moderate amount of luck I might escape the dance which was arranged for this night.

I strolled through a marvellous avenue of palms with a mahogany tree beyond; but I had not gone far before I found myself looking through the trees into a broad and comparatively open space. Many of the palms had been cut down here, but those that were standing assisted the twilight in making the place dim. It was this weird dimness that caused me to start, for I perceived that the place was crowded with ghosts—the first that I had ever seen in my life. There they stood, white and silent, about the clearing, and two or three glimmering among the trunks of the palms beyond.

At first I took them to be my fellow-passengers, but I soon corrected this impression; my fellow-passengers had not accustomed themselves to remain motionless for any length of time, and these were as rigid as if they had suddenly become paralysed. Some had their arms stretched out toward me as if imploring me to help them—it was not so dim as to make it impossible for me

to see distinctly their outstretched white arms. Others were leaning their seemingly weary bodies against the trunks of the palms; one was prostrate on the ground, and one—horrible to see—was headless.

There they stood in this strange haunt with the tall moveless palms above them, the purple dimness of the tropical twilight about them, and no sound in the air save only the occasional whisper of a ripple on the beach, the little splash of a fish in the bay, and the continuous quivering metallic chirrup of the tree lizards. There they stood, the ghosts of the old buccaneers who had made this place their rendezvous for year after year of their life.

I must confess that for some moments I experienced all the pleasurable horror which I understand comes to such persons as are so fortunate as to be gifted with ghost-sight. I was not conscious of being in any way afraid; I only felt that it was given to me to see the strangest sight of my life. Unfortunately this feeling was followed by an instinct of the literary possibilities derivable from such a source. The ghosts of the old pirates recalling their experiences in the Caribbean and along the Spanish Main—there was a theme, and it was given to me to work it out. I thought in a flash of the great names among the rovers—Morgan and Kidd and Bonnet and Blackbeard—famous for infamy. What would the ghosts of these splendid desperadoes have to talk about when they came together again with the falling of the night upon the cocoanut palms, upon the mahogany trees, upon the spreading mangoes, upon the contortions of the mangroves—with the never-ending chirrup of the tree lizards from shore-way and island?

I had allowed my fancy to carry me on for some time before I became aware of the fact that I was standing gazing at a scattered group of ancient figure-heads—the

figure-heads of the ships which had in past days been brought to the place to be broken up. And now, of course, I wondered how it was that I had failed to see at first what manner of spectres were these. But indeed they looked altogether spectral in the evening dimness—in their imposing attitudes—in their marvelous outlines.

I went through the trees among them. Here was a towering virago with big rings in her ears, and a double flowing mantle which bore the marks of the bolts which had secured the garment to the bows ; and not far off there was a one-armed male figure that might have been an effigy of Nelson. Three females of voluptuous charms amply displayed, but well within the bounds of prudence—in art decorum and decoration do not always go hand in hand—stood coyly among the trees. A gigantic Highlander whose hand retained only the hilt of his claymore, was in the act of lurching his way toward a lady with six feet of flowing tresses who was waiting for him in the open ; just behind him stood the headless figure : the work of decapitation had overtaxed the strength of the claymore.

These were but a few of the derelict figure-heads which were standing about me waiting, as doubtless they had waited for years, for purchasers. The market for figure-heads cannot have been very brisk at the island of St. Thomas or purchasers may have become fastidious through the development of art teaching, for the undergrowth about nearly all of them was dense, and creepers had entwined themselves up the drapery of some—nature's drapery concealing that of the carver and gilder. If left without attention for another year or two, only the heads of the tallest would appear above the green sea of vegetation, as they had appeared in the days of their active life above the green seas that broke

beneath them under the impact of the cutwater of the ships whose bows they adorned.

I was standing with my hands in my pockets silently examining these strange creations, when I heard the sound of voices quite close. I knew that some of my party had discovered the place and were about to investigate it. I was right. I saw two figures in white coming toward me ; but I did not at once perceive that they were hand in hand.

"The funniest thing I ever saw : just like ghosts !" came the voice of Miss Ormsby. "Look at this magnificent creature, Charlie."

They were standing together at this time looking up to the face of the gigantic female figure.

"A magnificent creature indeed," said Mr. Jaffray. "But for my part, I prefer something more petite—more like——"

In an instant he had flung an arm about her, and I heard the low laugh of the girl who has been kissed by her lover.

"You are too daring," said Miss Ormsby in a whisper. "Some of the others are sure to come upon this place returning to the boat. Well, only one more."

Before he had taken more than a dozen or so, and while their faces were still together, I had slipped behind the lurching Highlander and thence on to the avenue of palms. The foolish young couple had plainly taken me for one of the figure-heads and had walked straight toward me, only stopping for a sweet moment before the most imposing of the scattered group.

The moment that I regained the avenue I began to hum something idiotic, and before I had taken a dozen steps onward I met Mr. Ormsby. He had clearly just caught a glimpse through the dimness of the most

outlying of the figures—the carved figures, not the others. He was addressing the one that he saw.

“What’s the matter?” he said. “Are you waiting for anyone?”

Receiving no answer, he continued—

“Who the deuce are you? I can’t make out your features from here. Do you mean to play the ghost? Take my advice and don’t. The ladies may be coming through this way. Come now, like a good chap: I’m older than you.”

“Oh, no, you’re not,” said I, approaching him.

“Oh, you’re there?” he said. “Perhaps you’re in this game. It’s not a funny one. Show me a man that plays the ghost and I’ll show you one that plays the fool. Look here, old chap, we have had enough of that, haven’t we?”

He had turned to the figure-head once more and was remonstrating with it.

I could not help roaring with laughter.

“I can’t for the life of me see where the fun comes in,” said he in a slightly offended tone. “A joke is a joke, but that——”

“Is the figure-head of a ship,” said I. “The place is full of figure-heads of ships that have been broken up.”

“You don’t say so!” he cried. “Good Lord! I took it for one of our party skylarking. Now, how was anyone to tell in this light—my word!”

He gave a chuckle, leaving the avenue and stepping into the cleared space, before I could think of a way of preventing him. I felt that I had once more unconsciously been playing the part of a spy upon the young people, so that I owed it to them to prevent their being discovered by the father. To be sure, they had a minute in which they might possibly have escaped if

they had known exactly where he was standing, but I had seen no movement among the palms.

"My word!" exclaimed Mr. Ormsby again, standing beside his figure-head, and gazing across the clearing at the others.

I breathed again. The lovers must have made good their escape.

I went to Mr. Ormsby's side. The position commanded the whole group. There they were—the virago goddess, the giddy ladies with opulent charms, the headless warrior and the bloodthirsty Highlander—there they were, only more dimly seen by this time, for five minutes make a considerable difference in a tropical twilight—there they were, only——

Close to the gigantic female with the flowing robes were two figures which I had not noticed before. One was of a man—it was just light enough for me to see that the arms were folded; the other was a slim female figure, wearing a sailor hat and with her arms stretched out above her head as if in the act of taking a header.

"Upon my word these are about the rummiest things that I have seen for a long time," remarked Mr. Ormsby, his eyes wandering from one glimmering white figure to another. "Look at that big bounder with his arms out. I wonder what ship he sailed on. And the females—none of your pinching stays about them."

"I don't suppose that their ships ever missed their stays," said I; but I was too nautical for this gentleman from the Midlands.

"Is that a fireman? oh, no; only a Highlander," he continued. "And look at the one without the head. I remember reading a book when I was an apprentice called 'The Headless Horseman.' Maybe that was the name of the ship he came off. And look at that thin one going in for a dive—that's a good one, only roughly

carved—on the bows of a ship she would be taking a dive into every heavy sea.”

“Yes,” I said. “A capital notion. I suppose the carvers of these things have now and then a good idea. But I agree with you that the sculptor of that one was a bit of a duffer. She looks as if she wore stays.”

“Just my idea! She might be a modern young lady,” said the father of Miss Ormsby with a fine note of derision.

He was about to stroll among the figures when I cried—

“Hullo! Is that the boatswain hailing us? I think we should lose no time in scrambling down to the lugger. I fancy that we have delayed too long already. Where is Miss Ormsby?”

“That’s just what I should like to know,” said he. “I left her with young Jaffray at the side of the deck-house: I wanted to see if I could not buy one of the old ships’ bells as a souvenir. She must have misunderstood me when I said that I would rejoin them on the beach: she had a notion that she could pick up some rare shells. I’m afraid that she will be huffed with me for leaving her with Jaffray, though I will say that she is not so hostile to him as she used to be. Have you noticed that?”

I laughed.

“I certainly have not noticed any great hostility to him on her part,” I said. “I daresay we shall find them both waiting for you alongside the boat.”

I had had no trouble whatsoever in leading him away from that grove of graven images—and others; for he showed no wish to investigate farther than he had done. Only once when we had pushed our way to where the gleam of bright water appeared through the space between the palms, he gave another chuckle, saying—

“My word! wasn’t it a bit rummy my talking to that figure-head? Do you mind giving me a chance of

telling that against myself ? I'll amuse them all with it, you bet."

I assured him that I should never think of claiming copyright in the incident, and he thanked me for my forbearance.

CHAPTER XX.

When we got to the little wharf—it was a floating landing-stage like the one at Liverpool only not so large, being composed only of three old masts lashed together—we found that Mr. Jaffray and Miss Ormsby were not there. Of course we were both greatly surprised ; but I think that Mr. Ormsby was rather more so than myself. Mrs. Heber and young Conrad had also not yet appeared. Mrs. Heber was doing her best to discharge the duties of a conscientious chaperon to Meta Croysdale, by taking charge of the man who, she feared, might be trifling with Miss Croysdale's affections : if any affections were to be trifled with Mrs. Heber preferred that they should be her own.

But even while we were discussing the best way of calling the attention of the defaulters, Miss Ormsby appeared by the side of Conrad, followed by Jaffray and Mrs. Heber.

And they all somehow conveyed the impression to the others of the party that the four of them had never been farther apart during the afternoon than they were when we caught a glimpse of them marching down to the boat.

Mrs. Heber said—

“ How quickly the darkness comes on here ! I wish we had asked you sooner what o'clock it was, Mr.

Jaffray. I hope you were not uneasy about your daughter, Mr. Ormsby ?”

“Oh, not the least,” said Mr. Ormsby glibly. “I knew that she would be quite safe under your eye, Mrs. Heber.”

And the girl was smiling quite sweetly while she apologized for keeping the boat waiting !

I threw myself into the bow of the boat and began to smoke, laughing silently while I reflected upon the incidents of the evening—at the start which I had given on coming suddenly on the spectres of the grove—at the sweet unconsciousness of the two young people in walking toward me while I stood watching them—at the surprise of Mr. Ormsby on catching sight of the outstanding figure-head—at the marvellous adroitness of the simple young couple in throwing themselves into sculpturesque attitudes, so that Mr. Ormsby was deceived, and, finally, at Mrs. Heber’s readiness in giving us all to understand that she and young Conrad had never been apart from the other two, when they positively could not have been together for a longer space than five minutes.

I felt as I suppose a child must feel who looks on this world for the first time. I felt that I had never seen anything of the world worth talking about up to that moment. I came to the conclusion that it was a place of infinite amusement, but I was greatly annoyed at Myra Ormsby and her lover for having forced me for the second time into the odious position of a secret onlooker. I felt that I could be annoyed with her with a clear conscience, having by my tact with her father averted a *contretemps* ; for he would most certainly have continued his investigations of the statuary and have discovered their *poses plastiques*.

But then the possibility was suggested to me that it

might have been the intention of the girl to be discovered by her father in the pose of a ship's figure-head ; and if that was so, she would not feel particularly grateful to me for spoiling what would undoubtedly have been a very funny situation.

Upon due reflection, however, I came to the conclusion that the girl and her young man had no wish to be discovered in their fooling. For reasons of her own Myra Ormsby wanted her father to believe that she was still in love with the man whom she had left behind her in England, although for some time past she had accepted the attentions of the man whom her father had chosen for her, and she did not wish the latter to suspect that she was looking upon Mr. Jaffray with favour.

Now, ever since I had seen her through the broad banana foliage at St. Lucia, I had avoided Miss Ormsby so far as I could without being absolutely rude to her, the fact being that no one could maintain any sentimental interest in a girl who could, with such indecorous haste, be on with a new love before she was off with the old.

I had, as I have already chronicled, said to myself while thinking of her escapade : " Oh, woman—woman ! " and it would obviously be impossible for a man to remain on the same terms as ever with a girl after she had forced him to say " Oh, woman—woman ! "

But worse than all, she had deceived me, giving me to understand just three days before we arrived at St. Lucia that her affections were fixed upon the man from whom she had been rudely parted, while at that very moment, she must at least have been looking with an eye of favour upon the new love. I might forgive her for a good deal—for having made a fool of her father—for having made a fool of her lover, but never for having made a fool of me.

I resolved to be more distant with her than ever, and never again to get on confidential terms with a girl who had such sweet and trustful eyes. After making this resolution I muttered, mournfully shaking my head, "Oh, woman—woman!" and then gave all my attention to my smoking.

The evening was an exquisite one. The breeze was gentle, but it was quite strong enough to keep our sails full. We slipped through phosphorescent ripples, by the side of the little sand islands, which obscured our view of the open sea only to increase the effect when we slid athwart a channel that gave us a lovely glimpse of a rising moon and a world of waters on which the golden flakes of moonlight fell. In the other quarter of the sky, over the steel-blue shadowy slope of St. Thomas, a splendid planet was burning—a cut topaz set in a plaque of enamel, translucent as a sapphire. All the sky was sapphire, and all the ripples that quivered between shore and shore were like blue-bells floating by the thousand. The slope of the island had shred blue-bells into the water—fields of blue-bells, with here and there a quivering flower of flaming laburnum—for the reflection of the lights of the villas on the mount fell upon the rippling waters like a laburnum bough.

We arrived all too soon (for me) at the steamer, and some among us grumbled, saying that they should never be able to dress in time for the dance.

When the time came, however, it seemed that they had under-estimated their own powers: there was little sign of scamping their toilettes, although as a matter of fact they had only a fraction over an hour to spend in their cabins. Mrs. and Miss Baker, who had not left the ship all the day, and so had a start of several hours on the majority of their fellow-passengers, alone were late. But when we saw their dresses we admitted that

such a result was not obtainable except at the sacrifice of a large amount of time as well as money. Their costumes, compared with the next in grandeur to be seen on deck, were as the masterpiece of Titian is to the pictures that surround it in the Royal Gallery at Venice—as the “Don Giovanni” is to all other operas of melody. They were very striking and the attempt made by the wearers to appear quite at their ease in the midst of such surroundings, was a not unexpected failure, though they were greatly talked about.

I confessed to Mrs. Heber that I thought them very fine.

“Yes,” she said critically, “fine—they draw it very fine. They are just a little too—too—you understand?”

I fancied that I was not wholly ignorant of her meaning.

“You suggest that the line drawn between something and something else in their costumes is a very fine one?” I said.

“Just that, and perhaps a little more,” she replied. “The fact is, you see”

“Oh yes; we can all see; but, after all, the portraits of the Restoration beauties——”

“Oh, they were beauties, were they not?”

“They were all ladies of the highest reputation—for beauty, and they enriched the peerage by the addition of several great names.”

“I don’t think that these décolleté reputations—but of course, so near the Line as we are at present”

“Now you suggest that Miss Baker’s dress is rather over the Line?”

“Oh, no, only”

Well, we agreed that the Bakers’ costumes were magnificently inappropriate. They might have been worn

with distinction in the sanctity of a painter's studio and would probably appeal to the cultured eyes of a sculptor—they might have been considered the perfection of appropriateness in one of the scenes in the opera of "Manon," but on the high seas they seemed lacking in material in some parts and excessive in others.

The officers of the Danish man-of-war and those of the fort came aboard for this function ; and gave us an illustration of what good manners really are. If we had been the representatives of a great Power entertaining them at a State Ball, they could not have shown a greater appreciation of our little dance.

They showed themselves to be as courageous as they were courteous : one of them danced with Miss Baker. I saw another of them listening with a politely simulated interest while Major Heber assured him that General Buller had never done worse than make an ass of himself—or better.

"Don't you believe anything that you read in these pro-Boer rags," I heard him say. "Take my word for it, Buller is a badly used man. Brave? My dear sir, he never knew what fear was. I tell you that I served under him. I'll stand up for him ; there are plenty of others who will be only too ready to abuse him."

Mr. Fraser, who had delivered his lecture on Solomon's Temple to a select audience ashore on the previous evening, was very anxious to wind up the dance with an address on the Lighting and Ventilation of Noah's Ark—a subject which he said he had practically made his own ; but after some consultation it was found that, owing to the position in which the piano had been placed on deck, it would be impossible to suspend the sheet for the dissolving views. He assured me that we had missed

the chance of our lives of becoming acquainted with the details of a subject to which sufficient attention had never been given by the Universities.

The next day I paid a farewell visit to the tower which goes under the name of Blackbeard's Castle. It is at the rear of a very charming villa the gardens of which contain a great variety of tropical trees, considering how limited is the acreage at the disposal of the gardener. Of course the tower was never in the possession of the notorious pirate or any others of the Brotherhood. It was undoubtedly built for the protection of the colony in its early years. The view from the roof is magnificent, but whether it is worth the climb up so many rough stone stairs is a question the answer to which is wholly dependent upon the age and capacity of the climber. and, perhaps, one may add, his appreciation of views. For my own part I am of the opinion that distance, when measured perpendicularly, does not always lend enchantment to the view, though it increases the circle of one's horizon.

I was glad to be able to seat myself upon the stone parapet, after drinking in such draughts of sea air as might, if delivered on the instalment principle, supply me with ozone for the rest of my life.

Miss Crofton was my companion. Her father was interested in botany and did not care about scenery, so he remained in the gardens, while we gasped our way up to the roof of the tower. I was rather glad to be alone with her. I had not had an opportunity of talking to her apart since she had made me acquainted with the pitiful romance of her life when we left Martinique, I wished to talk to her about Martinique.

"Do I intend to go ashore?" she repeated; then she was silent. She leant one elbow on the stone-work and looked wistfully across the blue bay. I waited for

her to speak, but some minutes had passed before she turned to me saying—

“I cannot say whether I shall go ashore at Martinique or remain on the steamer. What would be the use of going ashore? Do you fancy that he would be likely to change his mind? If I thought—oh, you know that I am past the point when one considers a matter from the standpoint of whether it is ladylike or even proper—I should not care whether or not people declared my act unwomanly—I would go ashore and make the attempt to induce him to come to England with us and marry me as soon as we arrived. Sometimes I feel that I must do that—I feel that I cannot live without him—I think I feel that way just now. It is so foolish of him to look at this matter in the light that he does. Money? If the money was on his side do you think that I would demur? I cannot see that it matters who brings the money into a household—whether the husband or the wife. If a husband and wife are one—but what is the good of reasoning in this way? He will never be brought to see with my eyes. No, I do not believe that I shall go ashore at Martinique.”

“You do not think that in after years, when you recall how you stood on the deck of the steamer looking across the waters to St. Pierre, you will reproach yourself?” I asked. “Will you not think: ‘I had the chance of going to him—perhaps I might have induced him to see with my eyes—he might have had a weak moment—a moment when his foolish sense of honour relaxed?’”

She shook her head.

“Do you know,” she cried, “I sometimes feel glad—a sort of glad pride when I think how he has held out on a matter of principle—on a point of honour? I tell

you that I believe I should be happier apart from him, having this feeling, than I should be by his side and knowing that he had yielded to me in a moment of weakness."

What could I say in reply to her? I understood her thoroughly. I appreciated to the full the exact shade of her feelings in respect of the man whom she loved. I sympathized with her varying moods—with her perplexities—with her dread of remorse if she neglected an opportunity of going to him.

I was silent. We both looked out to where the shadowy coast of the island of St. Croix appeared in the distance.

"I do not believe that I shall go ashore at Martinique," she said again. "It will not be hard for me to live through the rest of my life cherishing only memories of the man that I love."

I said weakly, for want of words that were not commonplace—

"I wish that I could help you. I wish that I were equal to suggesting some way of making a happy ending to your story."

"That is so kind of you," she said; "but why assume that I am bound to be unhappy? I have nothing but pleasant memories of him. I know that he is true to me and true to himself. Is not that knowledge enough to make me happy?"

What was left for me to say?

We went down the long stairway without exchanging a word, and found Mr. Crofton among the giant crotons of the garden. We got into the buggy and drove back to the town at a fine pace, due not only to the circumstance of our going downhill, but to an important official engagement which the negro driver had entered into.

He explained to us that this was the practice day of the Fire Brigade, and he was a member. He seemed to be under the impression that the practice could not take place if he were absent—a very proper official spirit in which to approach his duty.

I availed myself of his courteous invitation to inspect the brigade, and I witnessed a very creditable drill with two engines. The more that I saw of municipal affairs at St. Thomas the more convinced I became that they are managed with tact and intelligence. The streets in Charlotte Amalia are the cleanest of any town in the West Indies, the roads are admirable, the police are obliging and the Fire Brigade highly efficient. The negro population have some idea of their duties as citizens. One of the boatmen who rowed me out to the steamer instructed me, inside a quarter of an hour, upon the various aspects of the question of the transfer of the island to the United States, and when I got out of his hands I felt that there was nothing further to learn on the matter.

(He did not ask me more than the regulation fare for taking me out to the steamer).

I left this delightful island with the pleasantest recollections, after a stay of four days. If it should eventually pass into the hands of the United States I feel sure that it will be turned into a huge hotel, and cable cars will run across the island taking bathers to the lagoon, where sharks are unknown. At present they are rather too numerous in the bay to make bathing agreeable, though there is a recognized bathing place near Water Island where the channel was cut to allow of a complete circulation of the current.

During our stay at St. Thomas I noticed with interest that Major Wingfield had gradually relaxed the stern view of his duty which he had taken in consequence of

his adroitness in killing the snake at St. Lucia. I could see that he felt that it would be taking a mean advantage of a fortunate accident if he were to place his deck-chair next to that of Miss Hope. The Krux people could not in the circumstances be otherwise than courteous to him should he make an attempt to join their circle, and knowing that he had this claim upon them, he thought that it would be playing an unworthy part to enforce it. When the Kruxes had been distinctly hostile it had given him great gratification to get the better of them ; but I fancy he heard some of the idiots who were sneering at him, whisper to one another that he would have an easy time in future—that he had laid the she-dragon under an obligation to him (they did not go so far as to exclude Mr. Krux in the obligation) and that he knew what he was about. This was enough to make him swear that he would never again sit in the deck-chair beside Miss Hope—never again instruct her in the mysteries of the ingenious Kodak.

I have alluded to his assumption of this generous attitude after leaving St. Lucia ; and he maintained it until St. Thomas was reached, only standing beside the girl for a few minutes at a time, and making enquiries respecting the shattered health of Mrs. Krux. Anyone could see that Miss Hope did not enter with any degree of enthusiasm into his views in regard to the Kruxes, though I am quite certain that she recognized the spirit under whose impulses he was acting.

She looked quite mournful and I believe that I once heard her say something quite “ snappy ” to Mrs. Krux. I hope my ears did not deceive me. Then she took to looking wistfully over the pigs of the past in her book, and finally she took to reading. It is only disappointment of the most acute nature that drives a healthy

girl to a book ; and it is doubtful if her sense of disappointment is mitigated thereby.

But on the night of our dance, Miss Hope, tastefully dressed, was sitting between Mr. and Mrs. Krux, Mr. Sowerby holding a watching brief in front of her, and the result of such an arrangement was that no one could get near the girl to ask her to dance. Once Mrs. Pritchard who was "receiving" quieted her own conscience by saying to Mrs. Krux, with the pleasant smile which one assumes when addressing a smileless person—

"Miss Hope is not dancing."

"No," said Mrs. Krux. "She has come on this voyage for her health."

Mrs. Pritchard said "Oh !" and did not pursue her enquiries.

But when the third waltz had woven its airy chain around those who were sitting on the chairs down the centre of the deck, Major Wingfield, who was still too lame to be able to hobble through even the Lancers, jumped up from where he was seated on the cover of the steering gear in the stern, and went straight to Ethel Hope.

"Is it possible that you are not a dancer, Miss Hope?" he said.

"She must be careful—very careful," said Mrs. Krux. "Rapid motion is deleterious. She is on this voyage for her health."

"Rapid motion and the *Amazon* have long been strangers," said Wingfield, smiling Mrs. Pritchard's smile of placation. "Of course you must dance, Miss Hope. I'll stand by, and if I see any rapid movement, I'll interfere."

While he spoke, the last jingle of the waltz melted into the moonlight. He went off with a wave of the hand

and returned in a few moments with an extremely upright Danish lieutenant.

“So sorry, Mr. Sowerby, but no idlers are allowed in the gangway,” he said, and all Mr. Sowerby’s resolution became as water. He swung his deck-chair round upon the projecting ankles of Mrs. Krux, and before that lady had recovered from the shock—while she was still rubbing the bruise—Major Wingfield had presented Lieutenant Svensen to Miss Hope, and Lieutenant Svensen, with his heels close together, was bowing and in his perfect English, begging the honour of a dance. When Mrs. Krux raised her head—she had stooped to rub her ankle—the alternative would, she thought (probably with good reason) be too startling—Miss Hope was walking down the deck by the side of the naval lieutenant.

Mr. Krux, who had not forgiven Wingfield for killing that snake which was about to bite his wife, pulled from behind his cushion a paper with puzzle columns and tried to involve him in its meshes; but Wingfield was wary. He thought that Mr. Krux had revenged himself sufficiently on him when he had forced him a few days before into the “lights” of a page of double acrostics, so he shook his head, saying—

“My dear Mr. Krux, I will not interfere with your chance of a prize. Intelligence is an element that only confuses the issue of your competitions.”

He was off, but not before he had noticed that Mr. Sowerby had so lost his head in the excitement of having swung his chair on Mrs. Krux, that he had stooped and was mechanically rubbing her ankle where she had left off.

Wingfield that night devoted himself to the duty of acting as “feeder,” so to speak, to Ethel Hope. His presentations to her were admirably representative of

all the grades of the naval service. This is an imperfect list which I made out on the back of a programme :—

Lieutenants	- - -	3
Sub-Lieutenants	- -	4
Marines—Captain	- -	1
„ Lieutenant	-	1
Surgeon	- - - -	1
Purser	- - - -	1
Second Engineer	- -	1
Artillery-Major	- -	1
„ Captains	-	2
		—
Total	-	15
		==

The general impression that prevailed on the quarter-deck of the *Amazon* was that Miss Hope had a pretty fair night's dancing. She did not get beside Mrs. Krux until our guests had been safely tucked into their boats and were being rowed through the moonlight back to their ship. Then Wingfield offered her his arm, saying—

“Let me hope that you enjoyed yourself thoroughly.”

“Oh, I enjoyed myself, but not—not completely,” she said. She began her sentence *forte*, but ended *diminuendo*.

“I am rather—glad,” he whispered.

I hurried away lest I should hear another word. That is what people do when they have heard all that they want to hear. I did not want to hear him ask her if the incompleteness of her enjoyment was due to the fact that she had not had a dance with him.

But I was in time to hear her reply to Mrs. Krux when that lady was scolding her for having enjoyed herself.

“I think that Major Wingfield had every right: he was on the Chitral Expedition with my brother,” she said.

What could Mrs. Krux, suffering as she was from a bruise just above her left ankle, say in reply to such a defence of Major Wingfield's rights ?

We said good-bye to St. Thomas the next day, and without there being the least break in the lovely weather with which we were blest, returned to St. Kitts, Nevis, Antigua, Montserrat, Guadeloupe and Dominica. As we landed for some hours in the afternoon at the last-named island I had a chance, denied to me on the outward cruise, of seeing something of this lovely place, and of contrasting the negro population here with that of St. Thomas. We never were so pestered with "vagrom men" as we were at Dominica ; and when, in no unmeasured terms, but with firmness, we declined their services as guides, they offered us every insult that monkey-spite could suggest. A couple of them went very near to hustling me. But knowing what cowards they were, I had only to make a motion of my hand toward an imaginary hip-pocket, to send them flying. They paid me the compliment of taking me for an American.

The market-place is far too large for the present day requirements of the town. It is for the most part covered in, a fact which seems quite to meet the views of the flies. The market-place is the rendezvous of all the flies in the West Indies, from the bumptious blue-bottle to the malarial mosquito. The negresses who attend to their wants, naturally tried to lure us under the roof, but as we thought that there was a sufficiency of food for them on the tables, we declined to figure on the menu for the day.

The patois of the negroes is worse than that which we heard spoken at Martinique. The women are even fonder of bright colours, but they have not the mock majesty of the ladies of the French island. Dominica

is a grand mountain of many peaks, wooded up to the highest ridge. The forests which we skirted on our ride of two hours, were striking beyond any that we had yet seen. It seemed that there must be miles upon miles of these forests, and every bend of the road afforded us an entirely new glimpse of the natural beauties of the slope. The ravines are dark with vegetation except where a torrent rushes down among the crags, painting the borders of its irregular course bright green. This effect, which is frequently seen in an English landscape, seems to impart a note of tenderness to the mad riot of the vegetation—the struggle of branch and root for light and space.

We were quickly under weigh for Martinique, which we were to reach in the early night.

I could see that Miss Crofton was overcome with restlessness—she had been impatient while we were at Dominica, and she only made a pretence of dining. By the time that the lights of St. Pierre were shaking on the water, her restlessness had become feverish. I knew that she was in a fever of expectancy. One thought—one hope—had taken possession of her mind: he might have come to see with her eyes since she had been with him, and the first boat to come alongside the steamer might bring him to her.

And what did his coming to her mean?

Well, I thought that I understood enough of her nature to be able to answer this. She possessed every charm of womanhood in her nature, and the constant aspiration of womanhood is not after happiness, but only to make someone else happy.

I did not go near her all this afternoon. I thought that she would be best left alone with her thoughts—her hopes—her doubts. I was standing at the steamer's

side looking across the sparkling water, at the lights of the island, when she came beside me.

"I suppose you will go ashore for an hour?" she said.

"I must get the photographic films which I left to be developed and printed," I replied.

"I will not go ashore," she said. "I have been thinking all day whether I should go or not, and I have made up my mind."

"Can I do anything?" I enquired. "Should I make an attempt to—to—could I do anything that would prevail with him? Would it be impudence on my part to suggest that—perhaps——"

She caught my arm suddenly.

"If anything happens it will be within the next minute," she gasped. "Oh, my God, my God! what does the next minute mean to me? What—what?"

She scarcely uttered the words above her breath, but they were quivering with passion—the passion of expectancy which had taken possession of her. She almost sprang from my side, and then threw herself into a chair facing the hand-rail which had just been lowered for the boats. Several were already holding on to the platform at the foot, and people were coming on board. She waited there with parted lips, her fingers locked together, while strangers came up out of the darkness into the light of the electric lamps.

I waited also and I leaned over the bulwarks so that I should be the first to catch sight of the man and signal to her that he was coming to her.

Boat after boat drifted up to the platform, amid the customary confusion; and numbers of people ran up the steps of the rail. I scrutinized every face. I had not the heart to look round; I knew what expression there would be on her face. On they came still by the

dozen—some chatting together—some on official business—some pausing half-way up to shout instructions to the boatmen.

He was not among them.

And then the numbers dwindled. There was no more confusion among the waiting boats. Only two or three men were on the steps, and they were in no hurry to reach the deck. The officer at the head of the gangway enquired if any of the passengers were going ashore. Immediately afterwards he called out my name and held up his hand. I went to him. He had a paper parcel.

"A man has just brought it aboard for you and is waiting to be paid," he said. "Take my advice and see that it is all right before paying," he added.

A young negro standing by took off his hat.

I knew what the parcel contained, without taking the trouble to read the business name on the label. A letter was attached to the parcel. I tore open the cover under the electric light, and found a letter and a bill within. The former I read.

"Sir,—I beg leave to send you the four rolls of developed films with prints of all that were successful. Two were spoiled through over exposure, and one is a complete blank. I fancy that you rolled up an unexposed film with one on which there was a picture, passing the number on the indicator. I regret that I am compelled to go to Fort de France for a day or two, but perhaps you will be good enough to pay the bearer the enclosed account.

Your obedient servant,

H. BROWN."

I gave the messenger the amount of the bill, with an extra half-crown to pay for the boat, and asked him if he brought a parcel for a lady as well. He said he had given one to—he turned to where Miss Crofton had been sitting.

She had disappeared, and I did not see her again that night.

Shortly after midnight I was standing on the bridge of the steamer looking back at the island. I felt sure that Miss Crofton's eyes were turned in the same direction. I felt sure that, on receiving her letter, she had thrown herself on her cabin sofa in a torrent of tears; but that was some hours ago. She would now be perfectly calm, wistfully watching that island disappear into the dimness of the distance—watching her hope of happiness fade into the darkness of the past.

CHAPTER XXI.

The next day at St. Lucia I had a rather interesting experience. By an extraordinary stroke of luck I was placed in a position to affirm that I had not returned from these piratical waters without being on the deck of a pirate ship—the only one that has been pursuing her calling off the Spanish Main for a century.

From time to time during the previous six months accounts had appeared in the English newspapers of the depredations of the steamship *Ban Righ*, which had been fitted out, partly at London and partly at Antwerp, for the Venezuelan insurgents under General Matos. But the nation was not greatly perturbed to learn that she had been implicated in certain acts of piracy on the high seas—capturing peaceful trading ships and fishing boats, impressing their crews and otherwise emulating the achievements of the craft with which the Caribbean was familiar for more than two centuries.

I had read all that was published respecting this modern representative of an ancient infamy ; and I was under the impression that the cruisers of all nations were chasing her from sea to sea, and that all the obsolete guns on all the obsolete forts—everything in the West Indies is obsolete, and so are the islands themselves—had been double-shotted and ready to be trained upon the piratical craft the moment that she should appear.

But when I came on deck early in the morning at St. Lucia and looked once more out upon the mountains of coal on the wharf, one of the officers of the *Amazon* pointed to a steamer which was being coaled just ahead of us, and said—

“That’s the *Ban Righ*.”

There she lay coaling, like an ordinary, everyday ocean tramp.

I hastened ashore and examined her fore and aft, but no trace of a name could I perceive, either on quarter-board or lifebuoy. I had never before heard of so modest a pirate. I could, however, clearly see where the original name had been carefully painted over, and on the bridge I noticed the oily glint of a Hotchkiss gun beneath a tarpaulin, mounted in the most ludicrous fashion on a ridiculous platform. This deadly weapon was in the centre of a conning tower, composed of what looked like the débris of a marine store in the Minories.

Derelict cork lifebelts, such as are suspended from the ceiling of a steamer’s state-rooms to inspire confidence in the minds of the passengers who are lying wakefully in their bunks beneath ; old cork fenders, packages of engine-room cotton-waste ; greasy bundles of sailcloth ; an oil-can or two—these constituted a most effective, though somewhat irregularly-built, conning tower for an intrepid gunner—only there was no gunner.

All along the rails stood unkempt rows of the most unsavoury ruffians that ever eluded the vigilance of the harbour police of the most notorious ports of three continents. When a thief’s hour is come, even a policeman will capture him—in time ; if appearances count for anything, I should say that the majority of the faces which loomed grimly through the smoke of their cigarettes, will not long remain on the sunny side of a window with bars.

The resources of the ship in this direction seemed unlimited. All along the lower deck were more gaol-birds, and on each side of the planks between the shore and the ship, were fellows awkwardly carrying ridiculous-looking cutlasses—scrap-iron cutlasses, hoop-iron cutlasses.

I enquired if it was their custom to cut down any of the negro women who delivered a coal basket short of weight, and one of the few white men—the moderately white men—on the quay-side told me that the cutlasses were merely for show.

They made a poor show.

I asked him when the comic opera was going to begin, and if a uniform price was charged for matinées. I thought I should rather like to have a front seat if it was cheap.

He smiled vaguely, and asked me if I had such a thing as a Jamaican cigar about me.

I gave him one of a less generous growth, and, taking my life in my hands, boldly marched up the pirate's plank. I had often written of the dangers attached to walking the plank in pirate ships, and I think I should have hesitated before boarding this particular craft had I not seen those cutlasses in the hands of the desperadoes, who touched their hats to me as I went among them.

I must say that on going aboard I was received by the crew of desperadoes with the greatest possible courtesy.

But as I looked around, I found my courage gradually oozing out at my finger-tips. It was not the pirates that I feared to face—I cannot imagine anyone doing this—but their fore-deck was a genuine terror.

One of the men with the Lowther Arcade cutlasses noticing my hesitation, and apparently being unaware

of its origin, asked me, in the language of the Spanish Main, if he could do anything for me.

I at once said, airily, "El Capitan."

The man explained with incomprehensible fluency but easily understood gestures, that I would do well, if I wished to see the captain, to go round to the front door.

It appears that I had come aboard by the tradesman's entrance.

I went ashore and walked along the quay-side till I came to the quarter-deck rail ; up this I went cautiously and circumspectly, but on arriving at the platform at the top I found myself confronted by half-a-dozen men wearing dingy uniforms—the uniforms of a jumble sale. As a matter of fact, their uniforms were not uniform, except in regard to dilapidation. In this respect, however, perfect unanimity prevailed.

They touched their caps, and I responded. Here, again, I thought I would spring upon them my recollections of comic opera, so I said quite glibly once more, "El Capitan ?" I was amazed to find that all of them shook their heads gravely. I smiled, touched my cap again, and made a motion as if I understood them to suggest to me the pleasure it would give them to permit me to search around the ship for their commander.

But, unfortunately, they did not take my inquisitiveness in the spirit in which it was offered, and they held up four warning hands to me.

At this point there came hurriedly toward us across the deck a medium-sized, good-looking man in civilian attire. "General Matos," said one of the officers, and I immediately took off my cap and salaamed, for I knew that I was in the presence of the revolutionary leader.

Anything less like the traditional revolutionist could

scarcely be imagined. Here was a gentle-faced, elderly man, with grey-blue eyes.

There was something of nervousness in the smile with which he greeted me, saying—

“Good morning, sir. May I have the pleasure of serving you in any way?”

He certainly spoke the best English that I ever heard a foreigner speak.

“I have the honour to address General Matos?” said I.

“That is my name, sir,” said he.

I handed him my card saying—

“I am an English passenger on the mail steamer, and I have taken the liberty of coming aboard your vessel to tell you how cordially we sympathize with your cause.”

I had not the remotest idea what his cause was, but I had had a considerable experience of Irish agitators, so I thought that I should be doing the right thing to touch as early and as frequently as possible upon the Cause. General Matos smiled blandly, and “winked the other eye,” so to speak; his amphibious smile showed me clearly that he saw through me.

“I am so pleased, sir,” said he. “I am only sorry that I cannot have the pleasure of welcoming you aboard my ship; but that is impossible. You see the state she is in—deplorable!”

“An apology is quite unnecessary,” said I. “I wished merely to take a stroll round your deck.”

“I could not think of permitting it,” said he; “the deck is disgracefully dirty.”

“No doubt you have great difficulty with your crew, sir,” said I. “How many men do you chance to have aboard just now?”

General Matos smiled once more quite blandly and expressively.

"The morning is extremely warm," said he, "and I should not wonder if the day were one of the hottest we have yet had."

"It is pleasant to escape an English winter," said I. "May I ask if that is a Nordenfelt or another Hotchkiss, under that tarpaulin astern?"

"Must you really go?" said he, smiling his ambidextrous smile. "I am sorry."

He held out a thin hand to me. I took it, with frank admiration of his methods.

"General Matos," I ventured to say, "we in England are most culpably ignorant of the aspect of politics in Venezuela; but I think I may venture to prophesy that you will be the next President, and if you succeed, you may be sure that the English people, in spite of their ignorance of Venezuelan politics, will regard you as a hero."

"Sir," said General Matos, with a gentle soothing waving of the hands, "have you ever tried the chocolate of Caracas?"

Now, the truth was that I had tried the Caracas chocolate, and found it—well, trying, and as I was afraid that the next step which this astute diplomatist might take to consolidate the *rapprochement* between England and revolutionary Venezuela, would assume the form of an offering of this particular comestible, I thought it wise to evade the responsibility which attaches to a political agent not accustomed to such delicate negotiations; and so, to avoid the possibility of an international complication, I thanked him for his graceful and certainly tactful reception, and also for the valuable information which he had given me regarding various matters, took the hand which he offered me, and went down the gangway.

Somehow I had a curious impression of having been got the better of by General Matos.

I took a thoughtful walk—when one is crestfallen one is usually thoughtful—among the palms and mangoes of the cathedral square, and returned to the mail steamer for breakfast.

But I had not yet done with the *Ban Righ*—her new name is *El Libertador*.

In the afternoon, when all the coaling had been completed—and paid for—there arose a great commotion among the negroes at the quay-side.

It appears that the rumour had got abroad among the negroes of the island that several of the islanders were about to be carried off in *El Libertador*, and they were determined, as one man, to prevent an infringement of the liberty of the subject by *El Libertador*; so when the captain had given the order to cast off the hawsers and the tinkle of his engine-room telegraph was heard, and the propeller began to revolve, they held on in a tug-of-war fashion to the after cable.

They held on like grim death, howling, yelling, execrating, like very demons.

Suddenly a figure appeared in the stern. General Matos took in the details of the situation with the eye of a strategist. In a flash he had whipped out of his pocket a weapon with a blade about the size of a dinner-knife; with a few masterly strokes he severed the strands of the cable where the tension was greatest, and in another second there were a thousand sprawling, jabbering, jammed negroes on the ground, looking like a jar of gigantic leeches hastily emptied out, and *El Libertador* had liberated herself and was already twenty yards away from the breastwork of the quay.

The negroes picked themselves up, and, still jabbering,

wiped the coal-dust off their knees, and shook it, Newfoundland dog fashion, out of their woolly locks.

But they knew that they were beaten, and they fell over each other in paroxysms of laughter, pointing to the steamer, which was hoisting the Colombian flag, passing the fort at the entrance to the harbour.

I need scarcely say that the presence of mind displayed by the general in that crisis which confronted him so suddenly, confirmed me in the impression which I had formed of him. He will assuredly be the next President of Venezuela.

CHAPTER XXII.

But when we were starting for Barbados in the evening. I found that we had as passenger one of the officers of the *Ban Righ*, and from him I got as much information on the subject of that craft as would enable me to discharge in the most conscientious way the duty of historian of the craziest cruise ever undertaken since the three wise men of Gotham went a-yachting.

I will frankly confess that the statements of a professional revolutionist, as this gentleman was, should, I have always thought, be subjected to what may be called a mental editing before being accepted as historical; and thus it was that, had I set about publishing all that my revolutionary informant told me, I should have thought it my duty to adopt, if I could, the literary equivalent to the attitude of the man who tells you something with his tongue in his cheek. But when, after an interval of more than a fortnight, I found myself aboard another steamer listening to a corroboration of all the details of the narrative by a very different sort of person, I felt—well, I felt that I had done an injustice to a man who combined two qualities rarely found in obtrusive association in the West Indies. My second informant was an Englishman and he did not profess to have any revolutionary tendencies. He was more interested in the revolutions of the propeller than

in all those that had taken place in South American Republics since the days of Bolivar.

He had nothing but good to say of General Matos : General Matos was a gentleman, and no man could work a donkey-engine better. It appears that Matos possesses a remarkable delicacy of touch in all his diplomatic relations with a donkey-engine as applied to a winch ; but the amiable general had, my friend believed, too little knowledge of human nature, to say nothing of Venezuelan nature—which is usually just the opposite—for his business. These were not the exact words employed by my friend, but I think that they express what he meant to say. For the benefit of such persons as are scrupulous about original texts and hesitate to accept paraphrases, I may mention that his exact words were : “ Matos took a bigger bite than he could chew.” He did not believe greatly in Matos’s powers of mastication. He rather thought that the *Ban Righ*—he never called that steamer by her new name—would masticate Matos first.

To return to the narrative of the cruise, as communicated to me by one officer and independently corroborated by another. It was quite pathetic to hear the South American professional revolutionist deplore the absence of self-restraint in a British dock mob. He shook his head sadly when he referred to the show of violence on the part of the crowd who fancied that the steamer was being fitted out in England by the pro-Boers. It seemed to make him quite melancholy to think of the rising of angry passions, even under the impulse of patriotism ; but this stern moralist was not on board the steamer until she had gone to other waters. It was not at the port of London, but at the port of Antwerp that the business of fitting out the vessel for naval warfare was completed. Business ? It might be

possible to find a more suitable word to express what was done.

This is how the good old coasting craft was prepared for her deadly mission. One hundred and fifty cases of varied champagnes—some revolutionists like it rather sweet, while others think that it cannot be too dry—were brought aboard, with some hundreds of dozens of hock—still and sparkling—an equal number of a very fine Sauterne, a few casks of pale sherry, tawny port, and a vintage claret. These were for casual consumption—ephemeral trifles, carrying with them no responsibility. They were of the nature of *hors d'œuvres*, for the serious business of the cruise brandy was shipped in cask—brandy prescribed by Dr. Johnson for heroes, and therefore eminently adapted to the needs of revolutionists. Rum, mellow with the traditions of naval enterprise in the West Indies; gin, anticipatory of cocktails; whisky, Irish and Scots, and “minerals” by the thousand, for the Spanish Main abounds in “mineralogists,” only they never omit the “whizzle.”

These represented the liquids in the victualling of the ship, and the caterer for the picnic was equally generous in the matter of solids. The refrigerator was packed with all manner of dainties. Hares, pheasants, grouse, woodcock, and wild duck found a place by the side of sirloins of beef, legs of Welsh mutton, sweet-breads, and other incidental dainties of *la haute cuisine*. Realising the fact—too often lost sight of by those who are supposed to look after this department—that the truest economy is to provide the best cook for the best food, the “management” managed to secure the services of a chef who had just left the yacht of a New York millionaire.

It was in such conditions that the ship's company went forth to “rough it” after the manner of the original buccaneers of the Spanish Main. The true spirit of

these daredevils found expression in what one of the company said to me.

"We didn't care how long the voyage lasted; not we," said the man, and I believe him implicitly.

They had champagne at every meal—some took it for breakfast—in the cabin; and the crew, simple in their tastes, drank whisky and soda. The stokers' palates were wanting in refinement: they stuck to the rum.

"Drunk? Not they. You can't make a stoker drunk," said my informant in reply to a question which I ventured to put to him. "No, there wasn't one that was drunk, but there wasn't one that was sober all the voyage. They were all 'happy.'"

I expressed no doubt on this point. It was clear to me that the "management" had been reading Mr. Gilbert's ballad of H.M.S. *Mantelpiece*. It will be remembered that, in regard to the crew of this remarkable ship—

"Did they with thirst in summer burn,
Lo, seltzogene at every turn;
Then lemonade and ginger pops
Stood handily at all the tops."

The *Ban Righ* became a second *Mantelpiece*—only more so. Every sort of game had its apparatus aboard. Cricket, quoits, bean bags, and "bull" were designed for the more robust of the company, and chess, draughts, and dominoes for the intellectual. A specially constructed photographic apparatus was supposed to appeal to all natures, and it did. There was not a man aboard who remained unphotographed before the ship reached the Azores; but after that the dark-room was deserted, and the camera was "kicking about the scuppers," I was told.

A truly delightful trip out to the islands had all aboard the revolutionary ship. She was provided with

a set of flags of all nations, so that she might be all things to all men, and hurt the susceptibilities of none. But when she reached Martinique, where her owner, General Matos, joined her, some little trouble arose, the fact being that the British captain, engineers, and crew had only shipped for the "run," and probably feeling suspicious on finding themselves so well off, declined to enter into the romance of the situation. They cared nothing for the enterprise of General Matos ; they talked of the Board of Trade. The result was that nearly all the officers and crew were paid off, and a company of " patriots," to the number of about three hundred, took their places. There was a long series of negotiations with the engineers, but nothing came of it, and French engineers were engaged. When the anchor was cat-headed off the ill-fated St. Pierre—no one then dreamt of the doom hanging over the port—the captain telegraphed "Stand by" to the engine-room, and then "Astern slow." There was no response ; the steamer began to drift. Once more the telegraph was set tinkling ; but it was a tinkling cymbal. The anchor was again let go and the captain sent a polite message to the engine-room by his second in command, asking the engineer what the—but messages from the bridge to the engine-room are of no literary interest. After a space an answer came that the French engineers had got up steam all right, but they greatly regretted that they were unacquainted with the best means of starting the marine engine.

There was a council of war held in the engine-room. One patriot suggested turning a certain tap, another said he was sure that a marine engine was set going by pulling a handle somewhere. Every handle was pulled, every tap was turned, and patriots, who are always suspicious, whispered of treachery. As a

last resource General Matos sent a message to the French cruiser, which was at the anchorage, to inquire if the chief engineer would have the courtesy to send a man aboard to show the engine-room hands how to start the machinery. This was done. The third engineer of the cruiser boarded the *Ban Righ*, now called *El Libertador*, and started her.

And then began the craziest cruise on record. It was the cruise of a ship of comic opera. The captain gave the order to clean down the decks, but no one responded. When he tried to hustle the watch they reminded him that they were patriots, and patriots never washed. The decks remain unswabbed. The tender touch of the emollient "squeegee" was unknown to the teak for weeks. When I visited the ship I made up my mind that I had never seen such decks in all my seafaring, so that I was not surprised to hear that the vegetable growths on the decks were becoming quite tropical, when the captain, driven to despair, sailed the ship into certain cross seas whose existence he knew of, and for one whole night she was subjected to all the rigours of that most drastic domestic remedy known as a "spring cleaning." "If he hadn't done it there would have been palm trees growing on the decks by now," said my informant; and then he went on to tell me that warning had been given to all aboard that the vessel would possibly ship a sea or two, so that everything movable should be made fast. The patriots paid no attention to this, and the consequence was that they were flooded out of their bunks, and hen-coops were found swamped in the saloon. "But the decks were washed," he added, with a nod that conveyed a good deal to me. He was an Englishman, and the recollection of the deluged domino-players—they were always at dominoes, he told me—seemed particularly grateful to him.

In the early dawn after this night of terror one of the many generals aboard managed to crawl up to the bridge where the captain was enjoying the scene of devastation, and commanded him to put the steamer at once into smooth water, abusing him in Venezuelan Spanish for having ever allowed her to leave the slumberous spaces to the lee of the Leeward Islands.

When tranquillity was ultimately restored General Matos thought the moment had come for asserting his authority. He did so through the medium of "proclamations." Every day brought about a new "proclamation," which was posted in duplicate all over the ship. It was quite customary to paste a copy on the chart-room door when it was lying open and hooked back. Of course, when the door was closed the "proclamation" became invisible. One of these documents announced that there would be Mauser drill on a certain day. When the day came several cases of Mauser rifles were hoisted out of the hold, Señor Matos presiding as usual at the donkey-engine, and the "drill" began. It consisted in every man firing off as many cartridges as he could lay hands on, with no particular object in view. When the men were tired or thirsty they threw down their arms and returned to their cocktails and dominoes. The rifles remained on the decks, not merely for days, but for weeks after, and when they were found to be rusty they were thrown overboard. Hundreds of rifles were thrown overboard and case after case of ammunition. Jettison seemed to become a mania with these "patriots." One day the patent log was missing. On another occasion, it will scarcely be believed, Lord Kelvin's deep sea sounding apparatus was removed from the stern and thrown overboard, the explanation for such an act being that it interfered with the after Hotchkiss gun. The same excuse was given to the

captain for the sawing away of twenty feet of the stern rails.

Out of the hundreds of comical incidents narrated to me by independent witnesses concerning this crazy cruise, I have only space for two in this chapter. The first was the gazetting of an officer "Lieutenant-General of the Condensed Water Tank." The ambition of every patriot aboard was to be made a general, and by the end of the voyage there were more generals on the ship than one might find "generals" on the books of the most popular registry office. It was found that the water was being wasted, and the captain persuaded Señor Matos to take steps to put a stop to this. The water tap was ordered to be secured by a padlock, but as the captain knew perfectly well that the majority of the ship's company had had considerable experience of picking locks, he used a pair of handcuffs for the purpose, and the key was given into the charge of a man who was forthwith gazetted in due form "Lieutenant-General of the Condensed Water Tank." In two days the key was lost, but not before the lock of the "irons" had been unfastened. The next day there was not a drop of water in the tank, and the boilers were being caked with brine.

The second incident which is typical of this crazy cruise was the firing of one of the large guns. The day had come when the ship was to be taken into action. The tiny gunboat *El Crespo*, of the Venezuelan Government, had been sighted, and showed no sign of running away. On the contrary, it turned a gun on the *Ban Righ*, and the latter, being short of coal, had to fight. The first shot discharged from her Hotchkiss on the bridge broke absolutely every article of glass and crockery in the cabins and kitchens below, so great was the shock to the nervous system of the cruiser. The general in command was about to order the saloon furniture to be

broken up for the furnaces to enable him to escape, when, to the amazement of every one, the gunboat hoisted a white flag, and Señor Matos boarded and formally took possession of the vessel in the name of the revolutionary party. The rumour that went the round of the Caribbean at this time was that the *El Crespo* had been scuttled; but at Martinique I came on a *Gazette* in Spanish describing the action and signed by Matos, and I am bound to say that it said nothing about the scuttling. At any rate, a fortnight later I was at La Guayra, and when being rowed out to His Majesty's ship *Indefatigable* I saw a tiny gunboat in the harbour. I enquired its name, but I had no need to do so, for when we got alongside I saw it on the quarter—*El Crespo*! The boat was in a perfectly sound condition, with only a small hole in the funnel.

Space would fail me were I to make the attempt to give all the particulars of the cruise which were communicated to me from time to time by a gentleman who was entitled to say "quorum pars magna fui." I need only add to this superficial but perfectly accurate résumé of the history of the *Ban Righ*, viewed from the standpoint of two of the most important members of the ship's company, that ten hours after being aboard the *Ban Righ* at the island of St. Lucia, I saw the Venezuelan cruiser *Bolivar* which had been sent to capture the revolutionary ship. It seemed to the commander that the best thing he could do was to get into the dry dock at Barbados without delay. So there was the *Bolivar* hauling into dock, while the smoke of the *Ban Righ*, of which it was in search, could be seen above the horizon! Half an hour later I found the commander of the *Bolivar* having a friendly cocktail with the gunner of the *Ban Righ*.

I could repeat all that was told to me of the serious

business of the cruise—of the foolish attempts to land arms, of the burying of arms in the sand at certain points along the coast of Venezuela, and of the digging up of the same arms a day or two later lest they should get into the hands of the Government, but there is no need to enter into further details. I had been told enough of the whole business and I had seen enough of it to prevent my being surprised when I heard that at last the boilers of the *Ban Righ* had become so caked that they were useless, and that the steamer had just managed to crawl through the Boca Grande into the anchorage off Port of Spain, Trinidad, where two Venezuelan cruisers had brought their guns to bear on her. I did not doubt the breakdown of the *Ban Righ*, but I must confess that I questioned the vigilance of Venezuela in the matter of the cruisers.

CHAPTER XXIII.

I had not the heart to examine the rolls of developed films or the prints which I had received from the English photographer at Martinique, until the steamer arrived at Barbados and I heard Miss Crofton telling some of the other amateurs how well her photographs had printed. She was exhibiting the pictures on one of the tables in that part of the companion which was called the drawing-room, explaining to her friends how we had been recommended by the lady of the *crème de cacao* to take our films to the English photographer.

"And you see the result," she said, pointing to the prints before her. "The French photographer refused to do anything for us, but no one could have been more civil than Mr. Brown. He had to go from St. Pierre to Fort de France yesterday, but he took the trouble to send the pictures aboard for us."

I was going ashore at that moment, but when I returned in the evening I brought the unopened parcel up from my cabin to the smoking-room, and invited Mr. Aytoun, who was the sole occupant, to admire the prints when I had taken them out of their case and spread them upon the table. The advantage of having a conscientious Scotsman as critic is that you get to know the worst at once. Like most conscientious Scots, Aytoun was prepared to criticise everything adversely at a moment's

notice ; and he had some fine chances when he was asked his opinion of the efforts of the amateur photographers on board.

He pursed out his lips over my prints, and asked me as if he were individually aggrieved at what I had done, why I had been so persistent in choosing the most uninteresting subjects. After calling my attention to the fact that several times I had got the wrong focus, and that my lens was an exceptionally bad one—that the detail of the foreground was misleading and that the whole series could only be regarded as possessing any value on the assumption that they were needed as illustrations of errors in exposure, the limits of his admiration were reached and he began to pour forth adverse criticism upon my work.

He was a very conscientious man.

“ You developed them yourself ? ” he asked.

I denied this side of the culpability of the work. There was a dark-room aboard the steamer, I believed, but apparently the management did not want it to be known—they kept it dark.

“ They were done for me by a man in Martinique ; and by the way, he says nothing about the defective lens or the errors in exposure.”

“ It was none of his business,” said my friend.

I had taken the photographer’s letter out of my pocket and was reading it again to verify my recollection of its contents.

I threw it across the table.

“ You can see for yourself,” said I. “ The few mistakes that I did actually make are not here.”

“ Ay,” said the Scot. “ Ay. I am inclined to believe that the greatest success of the lot is the one he refers to—the one that was a perfect blank.”

He continued looking at the letter as though he were

reading it over and over again. He turned over the page as if he were looking for a postscript, and finding none, he read the letter again from first to last.

"You are trying to read between the lines and discover some scathing criticism that does not appear on the surface," said I.

"Ay; may be that. Who is this 'H. Brown, Photographer, St. Pierre, Martinique' anyway?" said Aytoun.

"He is just that, I suppose—'H. Brown, Photographer, St. Pierre, Martinique.' Did you expect him to be Lord Roberts, or Kruger, or the German Emperor?" said I.

"You took the films to him to be developed? What sort of a man is he, now?"

Now I felt rather inclined to resent friend Aytoun's prying in regard to this particular man. Of all the men whom I had ever met Aytoun was the most given to what he called "putting two and two together." He was a solicitor by profession, and I suppose that he made his deductions from force of habit. It occurred to me that he might have overheard one of Miss Crofton's conversations with me, or that he had observed us talking together with some degree of closeness since we had been ashore at Martinique—perhaps he had noticed the perturbation of Miss Crofton on receiving her parcel from the photographer at Martinique, and so, as usual, he was putting two and two together.

That was why I hardened my heart against him when he asked with studied casuality what sort of man was this photographer. I determined not to gratify his idle curiosity, so I said, after only a trifling pause—

"What sort of man is he? Oh, I did not see anything particular about the man. He was a photographer sort of man, I suppose!"

"Ay. And about what age would you say?"

"About the same age as most of us—twenty-five or thirty," I replied with scrupulous inaccuracy.

"You and me—we're a bit over thirty," he said.

"Well, who knows? Perhaps Photographer Brown is no chicken either," said I.

"I fancied that he hadn't much experience of photography," said he. "Queer to find an Englishman living among these half savages at an out of the way place like Martinique! He doesn't write like a clerk or an English tradesman. If I wanted badly to hide myself from the police or the Official Receiver or a wife with theories I think that I would go to Martinique. It would be impossible ever to find a man if only he was wise enough to hide at Martinique."

"Do you suggest that Photographer Brown is a fugitive from justice?" I cried.

"I don't suggest anything of the kind: I haven't enough data to go upon," he replied. "But you saw the man—had he the look of a man who finds it convenient to live away from home for a while?"

"Not in the least; he looked like a well-bred Englishman and spoke like one," said I, feeling somewhat indignant at the result arrived at by my friend's pursuit of the principle of putting two and two together.

But the emphasis which I threw into my words had no repressive influence upon him. He only smiled when I had spoken.

"I have heard before now of well-bred, civil-spoken Englishmen who found it to their advantage to live where nobody could find them," said he shrewdly. "But, mind, I'm not hinting that your Mr. Brown—not a bad name to hide under—Brown—is either a fugitive or a gentleman. I shouldn't wonder if he was clean shaven; they usually shave off the beard and moustache. Man, you'd be surprised how hard it is to identify a man

you are accustomed to see with a beard, when he's clean shaven."

"I don't think that this Brown had been tampering with his appearance. He wore a moustache," said I.

"Did you say he was a short, thick-set man?" he asked.

"Yes," I said quickly, recollecting the fact that in my impatience I had actually given this persistent Scotsman a good deal of information regarding Mr. Brown. Now, however, I had recovered my equanimity sufficiently to deceive him again. "A short, stout man with a face like a cherub's."

"I've never seen a cherub; but I can fancy what one looks like—with a moustache," said he. "Ah, we'll let Mr. Brown be. At worst it may only be that he has run away from a girl—a girl that has either been unkind or too kind to him. He has made a good job of your photos anyway. They're not so bad when you look at them in the gloaming. If you take my advice you'll exhibit them only to your best friends and in the gloaming—they'll maybe pass at that."

I laughed and said that in future I would only show them to my friends. He gave a laugh too while he said—

"In that case I'll be always be ready to see them."

I flattered myself that on the whole I had got the better of this suspicious Scot. He was of such a nature as made it impossible for him to get that letter into his hands without having his suspicions aroused in respect of the writer. The caligraphy was not that of a clerk—that of itself was enough to set his imagination going. But then there was the fact of this educated Englishman—the writing was that of an educated man—living among an uncongenial

people. Why—why? That was what Mr. Aytoun wished to know.

I considered that I was fully justified in my evasions. When one is being cross-questioned after the fashion adopted by Aytoun, one cannot be blamed for being evasive. He had not learned much from me respecting that Mr. Brown, though to be sure I had ceased to be on my guard for a minute or two. Still I felt satisfied that I had given away nothing of Miss Crofton's secret. Aytoun wished to know everything about everyone. I did not doubt that he could have correctly estimated the amount of Miss Crofton's fortune, and whether or not her father's property was deteriorating in value; but though he may have suspected that Miss Crofton had a love story, he had not gained from me much information on this particular subject.

I did not say a word to Miss Crofton about the secret which she had confided to me, nor did she allude to it. What was left for either of us to say? There had been a little expectation—a little awakening of hope for a few days—that was all. The episode was over. She had taken up the book of her life where a mark had been placed at a page of an unfinished chapter, and she had read that chapter to the end. Now she had laid down the book once again.

We went to the island of St. Vincent from Barbados, steaming alongside a mountainous coast until we reached the harbour of Kingston, and found ourselves looking up a high slope broken up by romantic valleys. The vegetation here struck me as quite different from that on any other island in the Caribbean. It resembled more closely that to be found on the mountains overlooking some Irish lakes that I know in the south; though of course on landing one was soon made aware of the true tropical growth—palms, mighty crotons of gorgeous

colours, flowering shrubs that lit up the valley as with variegated lamps.

I chanced to have Miss Croysdale as my companion when I went ashore. Somehow Mrs. Heber had needed the services of young Conrad to carry something for her—I believe it was a trowel : she wanted to dig up a root or two to carry home with her, and she had heard that there was no place in the West Indies except St. Vincent where the right sort grew. I had never heard of her taking the slightest interest in botany until we were landing at this island.

Conrad was one of those young men—they are getting rare—who are always ready to sacrifice their own inclinations when a matron, old or young, takes them in hand. I felt sure that he was looking forward to a pleasant ramble by the side of Miss Croysdale, but Mrs. Heber had taken him in hand and he did not so much as make a wry face. I could not for the life of me, looking at the matter from a purely botanical standpoint, see why they should not all have gone together grubbing for roots and things ; there were no mystic rites that I had ever heard of to be observed in digging up tropical trash ; it was not the sacred mistletoe, and Mrs. Heber was not a Druid priestess ; but I said nothing.

Miss Croysdale and I met in the Post Office—a romantic building to which access was gained from a sort of courtyard by a staircase to the second storey—and I suggested that she should come with Major Wingfield and me in our buggy. She said that she would be delighted to do so.

I felt that Mrs. Heber was a very thorough chaperon. By taking charge of young Conrad she was preventing the wagging of tongues that would certainly have followed if he had gone a-walking with Miss Croysdale.

We had a pleasant enough drive through the main

street of the town, across a bridge that spanned a small stream, and then up the hill in the direction of a fort. No prettier town than Kingston, St. Vincent, had we visited in our wanderings. Quite a number of the houses have touches of colour relieving the monotony of the usual distempered yellow, and nearly all have bright red roofs. We got out of the buggy several times—to visit a huge Methodist chapel, evidently a very old building, and further on, a small arrowroot factory, the latter a very paltry concern. Wingfield said he was not greatly interested in arrowroot and its manufacture, though he once had been, so he allowed us to pay our visit without him ; and when we came back to the buggy we found that he had disappeared, leaving a message for us that he had gone on to the Botanical Gardens, where he hoped that we would pick him up later on.

Miss Croysdale was thus left alone with me, and I could not have had a more interesting companion. She was enchanted with the drive up the valley, pointing out to me a hundred varied effects, and telling me the name of every tree and shrub that contributed to the vivid picture. She had never been in a tropical country until she came to the West Indies, she told me, but her father had been devoted to botany and she had been familiar for years with such commonplaces of tropical vegetation as were around us.

“ I feel myself saying daily as Kingsley said, ‘ At Last, ’ ” she cried. “ I daresay that you as well as some of the other passengers have wondered what on earth I am doing here alone. If I told them that I had come out of pure love for the things that grow here, they would smile or shrug their shoulders.”

“ I daresay that they have smiled and shrugged before now, but I know that I have not,” I assured her. “ To tell you the truth, although I admit that I am

interested in the people whom I meet, I have never encouraged myself to investigate their private affairs. I have never asked myself what brought them here, for fear they might retaliate, and I might not be able to explain without a reference to some text-books of Hegel's philosophy how I come to be here. Let us hope that you are enjoying yourself."

"I should, if it were not for—for some things," she said rather sadly.

"Surely no one is unkind to you?" I said.

"Oh, no, but well—I think that it is just the other way," she replied.

"The other way—over kind?"

"That is what perplexes me. Sometimes I am very unhappy."

"That is rather a pity. Take my advice, give your heart up to your botany—to nothing else—nothing else—not even a man."

A tropical flush passed over her face. I am afraid that my suggestion disturbed her. There was a considerable pause before she said—

"That is the resolution which I make every day."

"Then you must see and keep to it. Good heavens! to think of anyone knowing as much as you do about botany and not throwing one's self heart and soul into the study when the chance comes of doing so. Give yourself up to this beautiful study to the exclusion of everything else—everyone else, and you will learn where true happiness is to be found."

I think that she must have detected a false note in my admonition, for she made no reply; and a few minutes afterwards the buggy pulled up at the entrance to the Botanical Gardens. She jumped to the ground and hurled at me in fun the Latin name of a shrub which sent into the air a magnificent purple plume. I had

never seen this glorious thing before, but she assured me that I had been frequently struck with it at Kew Gardens. For the next half hour she was my guide from bower to bower, from grove to grove. The Botanical Gardens at St. Vincent are not designed merely as a playground for the young negro ; they exist on as scientific a foundation as do those at Kew, appealing to practical as well as poetical people. The result of experiments made with coffee, cocoa, arrowroot, bamboo, and scores of other commercial growths is made known to enquirers, and when these islands, by the assistance of the required million or two to which I have already referred, recover themselves and become once more great centres of trade, the good work done by the Botanical Gardens will attain the recognition which it deserves.

Miss Croysdale made me aware of a fact, which I had never sufficiently appreciated before--namely, that the poetical side of these things of nature is the scientific side. The more I became informed of the functions of the various plants the more I became aware of the rhythmic enchantment of them all. The life of one of these flowering shrubs is a lyric, and Miss Croysdale seemed to understand all the meters in which it is sung by Nature.

One or two seemed to have about them something of an epic, and quite as many to be impregnated with the true spirit of Sophoclean tragedy.

"I have spent half an hour with the best poets," I confessed to my charming guide, when she had dissected a nutmeg growth for me ; and I felt that I had spoken the truth, though I have sometimes thought since then that, after all, the commercial aspect of flowers is the most poetical. But that is probably because years of arrogance and egoism prevent us from being able to

consider anything apart from its relationship to man. We feel that the highest function that any plant can fulfil is to administer to our comfort. We look for a larder in every grove.

While we were wandering among the nutmegs, we suddenly came upon Mrs. Krux and Mr. Sowerby. They were greatly perturbed. They had come ashore with Miss Hope and had by accident met Major Wingfield at the entrance to the gardens. He had promised to show Miss Hope the cocoa plants, and while they were going, as Mrs. Krux thought, straight for the section where they were to be found, Major Wingfield and Miss Hope had disappeared.

It was plain that the unhappy lady and her friend had been wandering about the gardens as if in a maze. They were both very hot and began to dispute as to whether or not they had passed a certain giant mango before. Mr. Sowerby affirmed that they had sighted it once and passed under it once. So that, after all, they could only have gone over a very limited area. Mrs. Krux suggested to us that we should take part in a systematic search after the missing pair; but I endeavoured to convince her that such a movement was wholly unnecessary. I felt sure that they would not leave the gardens without giving notice, especially as Major Wingfield was returning in my buggy.

Mrs. Krux was not convinced. She sent Mr. Sowerby halloing and coo-ee-ing down a long vista, and I will say that he performed his duty very thoroughly: I knew that wherever Major Wingfield and Miss Hope might be they would not neglect that danger signal, but would take good care to keep out of its sphere of influence.

It suddenly occurred to Miss Croysdale to ask Mrs. Krux if she had yet been to where the young cocoa plants were growing. If Major Wingfield had said that he was

going thither, was there any reason to suppose that he had changed his mind and route ?

From Mrs. Krux's reply I gathered that the cocoa plantation was the only part of the gardens which she had scrupulously avoided in her search.

"Then might it not be well to hasten there?" said Miss Croysdale.

The elder lady could not sufficiently collect her thoughts to grapple with so daring and original a suggestion, but gradually it seemed to dawn upon her that in sympathy with its surroundings it might contain a profitable germ. Miss Croysdale knew where the experimental section would be situated and guided us straight to it, the bass halloing and falsetto coo-ee-ing of Mr. Sowerby sounding fainter in the distance. When we reached the spot we found Major Wingfield and Miss Hope seated quite pleasantly together on a garden chair watching the young cocoa plants growing. One was sitting at one end of the chair, the other at the other end, which I thought looked suspicious.

The girl seemed very happy ; but she did not allow her happiness to warp her sense of duty ; for she administered quite a little scolding to Mrs. Krux for having wandered away with Mr. Sowerby from the straight path that led unto the cocoa plants. I believed that I heard Mrs. Krux express contrition for her error.

And all the time we were talking together the air was rent with the halloing of Mr. Sowerby. I believe that he was followed by a few hundred nigger children, who assumed that he was the pioneer of a new religious cult—one whose exercises were well within their powers.

"Well, we have seen where the cocoa shoots, so I suppose we may now leave the butts," said Major Wingfield.

We all went to the entrance, where we found our buggies. Miss Hope was by my side at this time. She

was full of admiration for the gardens, and was enormously interested in the culture of cocoa.

“Major Wingfield is quite an old friend,” she said in this connection. “At least, though I never met him in England—he went up to Chitral with my brother.”

I told her that I thought that was very nice, and she said that he was getting quite strong again, and would soon be able to walk without the support of a stick.

While we stood by the buggies we saw in the distance the figure of Mr. Sowerby. He was breasting the valley slope, halloing as he went. He was like a character out of a play of Ibsen—a man going laboriously up a purple slope halloing and mopping his face with a handkerchief—a blue cotton handkerchief with red spots. He gets higher and higher while a group of men and women watch him. He gives one hallo wilder than any that he has yet uttered, and the curtain falls. Mr. Sowerby was full of symbolism. The blue cotton handkerchief would, in an Ibsen drama, simply reek of symbolism.

We did a little halloing too, and he heard us and turned round. He breasted the slope no more, but came down to us with all convenient rapidity. This of course would be the movement of the Ibsen character in the second act—also marvellously symbolical.

In the boat going back to the steamer was young Gilbertson, and just as we were mounting the rail, he laid his hand on my arm saying—

“I am so sorry to bother you ; but would you kindly tell me what is the name of this island ?”

CHAPTER XXIV.

Coasting a long range of rugged islands known as the Grenadines, we reached Grenada. Like St. Vincent, the slopes are densely overgrown with forests of low trees, the most remarkable of which is the *bois immortelle*. It is of a brilliant orange, so that a small plantation gives quite a strong and welcome colour to the whole landscape. The town is built on a narrow promontory, and seemed to me the snuggest that I had yet seen in the West Indies. I daresay it was the church tower that gave me this impression of the place. It suggested a white English village nestling among trees at the foot of some downs. Every island town in the West Indies has its own characteristics, but I do not think that any are so pleasing to a wanderer's eye as those of Kingston at St. Vincent, and Georgetown at Grenada.

The harbour of the latter is one of the best, as it is certainly one of the most picturesque. The *Amazon* did not, however, go beyond the roadstead. To reach the harbour one sails between two headlands—an old fort crowns one of them—and keeping close to the shore, finds oneself completely landlocked. A steamer of two thousand tons can unload at the quay-side.

We went ashore in one of the ship's boats, rounding the nearest headland and sailing through the loveliest piece of water I had ever seen. The bay here is like a

lagoon, and the white serrated coral at the bottom reflects the sunlight, filtered, as it were, through fathoms of water of the green of a chrysoprase. Every moment of our progress through the bay made us aware of an added picturesqueness to the town. Houses with bits of colour and red roofs nestled among mighty cabbage palms and huge mangoes. All up the side of the soft green slope are clumps of feathery palms, and bananas and groves of limes. All the variations of green are here, from that of the spring lettuce to that of the holly—varnished and shining.

For close upon a mile our boat slipped through the water and we felt that we were being fondled by this voluptuous landscape on each side of us. The bay had taken us into its arms and it seemed to me that the world had nothing better to offer me than this. Between the surface of the water and the white coral shining up from its depths, hundreds of fishes, pink and crimson and lemon, lazily swam. We could see their shadows on the white below. It was the first time that I was in a position to appreciate Tennyson's striking simile—

“A shoal of darting fish

Come slipping o'er their shadows on the sand.

But if a man who stands upon the brink

But lift a shining hand against the sun,

There is not left the twinkle of a fin.”

We landed at a little boat jetty at the deepest part of the hollow of the bay, and at once found ourselves in a mangrove brake. For a mile alongside the shore a tangle of snake-like roots spread itself abroad, and the boughs locked themselves overhead, so that we walked through a tunnel whose woven wall no machete could pierce. Happily planks had been laid upon the roots, so that we were spared making a journey of a hundred yards upon the most distasteful of paths.

Miss Croysdale was delighted to find that this was the water entrance to a garden more spacious even than that at St. Vincent. She asked me if I would like another lecture on the botany of the islands; and I certainly should have liked another; but I noticed that young Conrad, who was in the bow of the boat, gave a little uneasy writhe at the suggestion, so I thought it better to shake my head.

"I do not want to cram my botany," I said. "I am anxious to assimilate the knowledge which I gained yesterday, before going any further. But every island is but a new Botanical Garden only not arranged systematically; I shall have other opportunities of sitting at your feet."

"I knew that I was so dull that you would never stand another half hour of my botany," said she; and while I told her that I had never been more interested in all my life before, I could see Mr. Fraser fumbling with his note-book.

"I am taking down a remark you made," he explained to me.

"You make me dizzy," I said. "Little did I think when I left for these parts, a simple man eager to learn, that any remark of mine should be thought worthy——"

"Oh, but I am improving on it of course," said he.

"Of course—oh, yes, of course."

"Yes; you said 'Every island in the West Indies is a Botanical Garden,' and 'God is the Curator of all' are the words which I have added. I will embody the whole in my lecture on the islands."

I assured him that words could not express my obligation to him, but I hoped that he would not jeopardise the success of a lecture for the sake of doing me a kindness.

I found the caretakers of these gardens just a little

too courteous to strangers—a little too anxious to give one a smell of a camphor bush or to explain the mystery of the milk in a cocoanut ; but I suppose they think, with Mr. Fraser, that it is well to combine entertainment with instruction. They certainly do their work well and their gardens are a credit to the island.

I renewed my acquaintance with the growing of black pepper, nutmeg, camphor and quite a number of other dainties, not forgetting the “ paw-paw,” as it is called in these islands—a fruit out of which a fortune will one day be made ; for it is not only the most exquisite of all preserves, it is also the most remarkable digestive that exists in nature. I heard a great deal of its qualities in the West Indies—how a small portion of the fruit will prevent the most unpromising meal from carrying with it the customary pang, and how a tough steak will become toothsome if wrapped for an hour or two in paw-paw leaves. It was, however, left for an American whom I met in these waters to assure me that the preserved fruit was capable of producing results equal to those attributed to pepsin. When an American, brought up on iced water and gum—one of the great nation that has invented fourteen sorts of dyspepsia—can say so much for the fruit, it appears to me there is a great future in store for it in a world that is dining later every year and more expensively.

I walked for a mile or two up the slope, passing several neat villas with gardens which I envied, every hundred yards giving me a new and more glorious picture of mountain and sea ; and then, keeping to the town side of the height, I found a very good track that led me down to the coast road half-way round the bay. I reached the town in the twilight, so that I saw it to the greatest advantage. I was told that it had become shabby since the great depression had set in ; but I saw

none of this shabbiness about it. The houses seemed for the most part spacious and well built. As usual I came upon large warehouses quite empty—relics of the days of great trade. I had seen the same melancholy sights on the west coast of Ireland—at Galway, Westport, Sligo and Limerick.

I went out to the *Amazon* before the twilight had darkened into night. A grateful breeze was blowing from the land and the boat felt its effects on rounding the headland. The waves were full of colour and the oar blades dropped golden phosphorescence. All the sky was streaked with pink, and in the North West there were roseate ribbons flowing above the purple ridge of the slope. Looking seaward there was an island of amber above the horizon, delicately transparent and with the creamy cloudiness of amber. In the far distance the sea was bright as steel.

Every moment saw a change in the colouring of this wonderful picture. Before one had time to point out an effect it had passed away,

“ Like the lightning that hath ceased to be
Ere one can say ‘ it lightens.’ ”

Such a phantom fairy of twilight tints I had never seen before. The sky was like the sky of a northern night when all the armies of the aurora are riding forth with lances of gold and on every lance there is a pennon of pink.

And yet when we had crossed the channel between the ship and the shore, the night had come. A night of regal blue—a silken robe buttoned with diamonds.

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I stood at the ship's side looking at the twinkling lights of the island, and I made a remark without noticing who was beside me.

"Yes; I think it is all quite wonderful," came the response in the voice of Myra Ormsby.

I asked her if she had been ashore and she replied that of course she had been ashore.

I did not feel called on to ask her what she thought of Grenada, but though I felt hurt by her recent treatment of me I could not turn round and walk away. There was a long pause, however, before she leant her elbow on the bulwarks and her chin on her hand, and then said in a low voice, with a little aggrieved note sounding through it—

"Why is it that for some time past you have kept away from me? You used to come beside me and chat, and I told you about myself—I confided in you?"

"Oh," I cried; "did you—did you?"

"You know very well that I did. And you said straight out once that you were on my side. Are you not on my side still?"

"I cannot tell you until I know what is your side. What is your side, Miss Ormsby?"

"You know perfectly well what it is. I told you that I had met a man in London, and that my father had been so unreasonable that he would not even let me say what his name was, but bundled me aboard the steamer that brought us out—I told you all that and you advised me—now did you not?—to be faithful to him."

"I admit all. Now, can you stand beside me with those stars looking out of that wonderful sky at us—with that Star of Love throbbing over the fort there—and tell me that you have been faithful to that man?"

"Yes," she said, "I have been faithful to him—I have never had a thought of anyone else."

She had turned her head half-way round, her chin being the pivot, and her hand its rest, so that she was

looking straight into my face. Her voice was sweet and low and firm. What a thing is woman ! She had, I knew, been with Jaffray on the island, and I felt confident that she had allowed him to kiss her among the foliage. It had been a cruise of kissing with them from island to island.

I shook my head murmuring impersonally—

“ Oh, woman, woman ! ” Then I looked at her saying very personally, “ Faithful ?—after that—— ”

I made a move.

She stopped me.

“ Don’t go away,” she said pleadingly. “ I wish so much to talk to you. I have been living a life of deception and I am very happy—I mean I am very unhappy.”

“ Had you not better make up your mind which you really are—happy or unhappy ? If you were to ask me to give you an opinion on the subject I should say that you would do well to give the casting vote in favour of the happiness,” said I with great severity.

“ Yes, I think that I am fairly happy,” said she complacently ; “ but it is just that that makes me unhappy—it is so wicked of me to be happy.”

“ When a woman’s happiness is the result of wickedness,” I began ; but the little laugh that she gave arrested my morality.

“ It was on account of the wickedness that I chose you to talk to,” she said ; and I told her that I felt greatly flattered. “ Yes,” she continued, “ I have been deceiving my poor dear father.”

“ As an expert in wickedness, I can assure you that that doesn’t count,” said I. “ What does count is deceiving a comparative stranger such as myself.”

“ But I never did that—at least to no great extent.”

"You told me that you meant to be faithful to the man whom you left in England."

"Ah ; that is just where I deceived you and my poor dear father. I did not leave that man in England."

"You—what ?"

"I did not leave him in England. I brought him with me. His name is Jaffray—Charlie Jaffray."

Some moments had passed after she made this revelation to me before I recovered from my surprise. Then I merely said—

"Oh !"

"Yes. I think that I feel easier now that I have confessed. I felt sure that I should. After all it was my mother who made the suggestion to us. She is so clever. It all turned out just as she said it would. Father was so unreasonable. I told you that he would not even allow me to mention the name of the man who had proposed to me when I visited Aunt Agnes in London. It was mother who thought that father and Charlie should be brought together somehow, and she came to the conclusion that there was no better way of giving Charlie a chance of showing father what he was, than a long cruise. Well, it has turned out better even than we could have hoped. Father is never tired of singing the praises of Charlie in my ears."

"And your life of deception consists in pretending to him that you care nothing for this Charlie of yours ? Well, this is a very pretty little story taken as a whole. But how is it to end ? Are you going to allow your poor father to come upon you and your Charlie when the latter has his arm about your waist ? There may be other ships' cemeteries with monumental figure-heads besides the one at Krom Bay."

She gave a delightful laugh—a laugh with a blush rippling through it.

"What, were you there too?" she asked in a whisper. "Was there ever anything so funny? We had no way of escape after we heard papa's voice; so the idea struck me—we thought what a piece of luck it was that you should urge him to hurry down to the boat. We thought that it was luck, but you had seen us and—oh, it was so good of you!"

"I have lived a life of deception in my time, and I also found it very pleasant," said I. "But don't you think that it is about time for you to withdraw some of your reluctance to the society of Mr. Jaffray? You must give yourself a margin for doing it gradually."

"That is just what I want to talk to you about," said she quickly. "Would you advise us to confess all to my father?"

"All—all? No confession that ever was made to father or mother or husband or wife includes all," I said. "And most confessions are merely an acknowledgment of the acuteness of perception of the one to whom they are made. You would not confess anything if you did not think that you would be found out."

"Indeed, I am genuinely unhappy—sometimes."

"Of course: at such times as you think you may be found out."

"Tell me what we are to do and we'll do it."

"You will? Yes, if it agrees with what you mean to do."

"Why will you be so horrid?"

"Because you deceived me; and for a whole week I have been disappointed in myself—actually doubting my own cleverness, because I had failed to see through you—because I had had faith in the faithfulness of such eyes as yours, and that faith was rudely shaken. Is it any wonder that I should be horrid? If you were to confess to your father how you have deceived him I

think it very likely that he would be horrid too. No man likes to be got the better of. I do believe that he would be less horrid if he were to find you out: it requires some cleverness to find out a deception. One has got more or less respect for the person whom one finds out, but never for the person who confesses. One feels slighted at a voluntary confession: you see it implies that you hadn't the ability to find out."

"I don't understand all this. I am very sorry but I don't really. You said something about withdrawing my reluctance—gradually."

"And seriously I believe that that would be the best thing that you could do. I know that if I had been properly grounded in my catechism, I should urge you in the strongest language that I could borrow from the Mosaic dispensation, to confess to your father how you have deceived him. But you see I'm not high principled. I want you all to be made happy—your father especially. He would never be happy or allow you to be happy if he knew that you had deceived him, and that your mother had deceived him, and that he had deceived himself when he fancied that he was doing a clever thing in getting you to cease thinking of the man at home whose name he never knew, in favour of the man to whom he has taken so great a fancy and whose name he knows to be Jaffray."

"Then you think that we should not confess?"

I saw her face brighten while she spoke. She was anxious to obtain the justification of my counsel for not confessing.

"I don't see why you should confess. I think you will find it much more convenient to show yourself interested in your father's choice. I can't see why you have hitherto shown so marked an indifference to him."

"We thought it better, for fear that father should have the least idea that Mr. Jaffray was—was—the other."

"Perhaps it was as well. He will think all the better of you for your holding out against Mr. Jaffray. I don't see why Mr. Jaffray should not go to your father some of these days asking for permission, as a high-minded young man should, to pay his addresses—is that the phrase?—to you. Of course your father will warn him what to expect, but I think that the young man will persevere."

"And after that?"

"After that you may rebuff him for a while—yes, I should certainly prescribe a rebuff; but then you will come to see that your father's wishes should be the only consideration of your life, and you will accept the man of his choice."

"That is exactly what we had arranged to do all along," she cried. "There is really not much deception in the matter, and besides"—she made the little pause which invariably precedes a gentle woman's sophistry—"besides, we are only deceiving him for his own good."

The dinner bell went clang.

CHAPTER XXV.

The laugh against myself in which of course I could not indulge in Miss Ormsby's presence, came off in the seclusion of my own cabin. I could not understand how it was that I had never so much as suspected the truth. Now that I knew what the truth actually was it appeared to me that only the least imaginative person could have failed to see it. I had preferred suspecting the girl. When I recollected the eyes of that girl I could not understand how it was that I had ever mistrusted her. Only a fool would have done so—a fool who possessed some qualities even less worthy of admiration than ignorance.

It took me some time to realize that, in spite of that sweet expression in her eyes when she looked at me straight in the face, Miss Myra had actually been playing a trick upon her pure minded father; and—this added to the culpability of the offence—playing it upon him with consummate ability. I cannot say that this reflection interfered to any great extent with my appreciation of the sweetness of the girl. No man, from Othello down, ever thought the worse of a sweet girl who had “deceived her father and may thee.” It is not safe, however, for a girl who is not sweet to take it for granted that she may do the like without causing pain to her friends.

And then I was led on to think of the girl's mother who had suggested the playing of the trick upon her husband. I wondered was she justified in doing so ; and the conclusion to which I came was that she was quite justified—so rapid is the growth of moral deterioration when it once sets in. I was able to persuade myself that, because Mr. Ormsby had acted unreasonably, his wife and daughter were fully justified in letting him have his own way. I felt sure that, when Mr. Ormsby said that his wife was a very clever woman, he was only speaking the truth. She was not only a very clever woman, she was a woman whom it would be very easy for a man to get on with. I felt sure that she and Mr. Ormsby got on well together, and I was equally convinced that when their daughter Myra married Mr. Jaffray, and Mr. Ormsby reminded his wife that it was solely by reason of his astuteness that the girl had been saved from the clutches of that adventurer to whom she had taken a foolish girl's fancy when in London, there would be no rupture in the Ormsby household. The lady would give him a chaste smile and a few moments later she would laugh. If he enquired the cause of her mirth she would say that all's well that ends well.

And she would say what was quite right.

This was how I tried to justify the very wordly advise which I had given to Miss Ormsby, and which, as it so exactly coincided with the course which she had determined to pursue, she assured me she would adopt. I was worldly minded enough to feel that, if everything turned out well in this little romance, I had given the girl good advice ; but if there was any hitch, the advice which I had given her was bad. I had also all the satisfaction which was to be found in the reflection that if any hitch occurred, I should be blamed by Miss

Ormsby, but if everything ran smoothly, she and her lover would congratulate each other on their cleverness in having resolved to pursue the course which—but of this they would take no count—I had advised.

When I went on deck to smoke after dinner, I found Miss Ormsby sitting by the side of Jaffray, and apparently enjoying whatever information he was imparting to her. It was her father who, with infinite slyness—the slyness of the successful merchant of the Midlands—called my attention to this fact.

“I am very hopeful,” he whispered in my ear. “He has a great fund of information. Of course I am not blind to the fact that he is not just the sort of man who would attract a girl : he hasn’t the turned-up moustache and the curly black hair—doesn’t the poet say something about the raven’s wing?—of the young man on the chocolate box—he isn’t the hero of the young ladies’ seminary, but he is a young man of sterling merit and excellent principles—straightforward—incapable of deception. That is the only thing that makes me uncertain about his career at the Bar.”

“If that is your only misgiving, Mr. Ormsby, I would not let it trouble me too much if I were you,” said I.

“I see what you mean,” he said. “Yes, I have thought of that too : if he can suggest to a jury as he has to us, that he is incapable of deception, it may be to his advantage. That is what you mean?”

I told him that something like this was in my mind. I added that it seemed to me that he had come to be very sure about Mr. Jaffray’s character and attainments although he had known the young man only a short time.

“I think somehow that one comes to know more about a man in a week on the same ship than one could in a year on land,” he said. “Oh, I am quite sure about Jaffray. I only hope—but she must have time—she

must have time. What do you think? You have knocked about the world. Do you think it possible that she will ever see with my eyes?"

"I think that it is more than likely that she will look with favour upon Jaffray," said I.

"What? Well, you are encouraging," he cried. "But how about that fellow in London? Do you think it possible that she will forget him?"

"I don't say that, Mr. Ormsby," I replied, doing my best to suppress the laugh which I felt coming; for I felt myself to be one of the characters in a farcical comedy—a character who has been "let into the secret" of the plot in the second act, talking to one who has not. I hardly knew the dialogue of the piece: I could only struggle on. So I tried to look very serious while I repeated—

"I don't go so far as to say that she will absolutely forget him; what I do think is that—that—well, girls are curious; I believe that with Miss Ormsby the identity of the man whom she met in London will somehow insensibly become merged in this Mr. Jaffray, and she will actually take up the thread of her love just where she dropped it, only now it will be Jaffray who will assist in her weaving. I hope that I make myself clear. I am afraid that I do not."

"You make yourself perfectly clear," he said, "only it's deep—very deep."

"Not too deep to be beyond experience, I hope," said I.

"Well, I hope not," said he doubtfully. "One identity will become merged in the other—that's your notion?"

"Precisely. The fact is that at first girls are really fonder of the idea of loving than they are of any particular individual. They are so fond of love as a

sentiment—as an instinct—that they are ready—only too ready, to make the nearest man the object of their affection. But if that particular man is placed beyond their reach they usually—I don't say invariably—find no difficulty in transferring their love to another. They have no qualms: they feel that they are faithful to the sentiment of loving. And really their affections have not changed—the object of their affections becomes merged in another—that's all."

"I have always been a busy man, sir," said Mr. Ormsby after a long silence. "I have never had time to study the—the principles of—of what you are talking about. But I trust to you. I look to you as a sort of—a sort of specialist, if I may be allowed the expression; and I am much obliged by the interest you take in what concerns me—that's why I have taken the liberty of talking to you about my affairs. What a lovely night it is! I suppose we shall reach Trinidad early in the morning."

I expressed a hope that we should be able to go ashore after breakfast, and so we parted. I questioned very much if he would be so eager in future to talk to me about his daughter and her prospects.

I got up shortly after sunrise in order to catch a glimpse of the imposing entrance to the Gulf of Paria, which has for centuries been known as the Boca. Columbus, who was the greatest poet that the world has ever known—not a weaver of verses, but a man whose splendid imagination enabled him to see a world where the eyes of the next gifted of humanity saw only grey sea and grey mist—looked at everything with a poet's eye in the coasts which he discovered. He named the headlands The Dragons when he sailed his caravel between them. Possibly he did so with a touch of banter against his crew who were perpetually seeing dragons

and rocs and balls of fire during his eventful voyage. One can hear him say—

“There are your dragons at last, and we are sailing into their very mouths.”

He records the fact that he was much awed at the first sight of the open Boca.

And here were we standing in the early morning on the bridge of the *Amazon* looking straight ahead to where the dark coast lands trended together on each side of us until there was only a narrow space of silver water quivering between the headlands. For the middle of this we steered. It did not seem as if there would be width enough to allow of our steamer squeezing through without scraping the paint off, but as we approached the strait appeared to widen. So magnificent a gateway is not to be found in any part of the old world. Gibraltar Straits are too wide to give to anyone the idea of a gateway, and the Hellespont is feeble in the impression that it conveys. But the Dragon's Mouth that stood open to swallow us is barely three hundred feet wide. Those jaws are not too large to allow of our seeing that they wear the expression of ferocity all at once. We could see the sharp teeth gleaming to right and left, the froth slavering about them. Then there came the moment when the sound of our propeller was echoed back by the great flat headlands. Our voices had lost their sea sound. We seemed to be within the walls of a stone-built room. We were striking the narrow water pass, the rocks towering above us to right and left, the pelicans and other great sea birds flying slowly past us, the waves climbing up the cliffs, and gurgling and choking and strangling in the channels of the crags; and then we slid slowly through the shadowy tract into the mystery of a new sea.

Immediately on passing the strait the shores on both

sides opened out before us. They are bold and in some places bleak, in others clothed from sea to summit with low forests. On one side the splendid chain dwindles away into the blue haze of the Venezuelan mountains, on the other hand a fainter haze hovers far away ; but the green slopes of countless island rocks, with azure channels of rippling water lapping them, are under our quarter, fragments of the cataclysm that broke off Trinidad from the Spanish Main.

Before we have steamed many miles we notice a change in the tint of the water. This great shallow Gulf of Paria feels much of the influence of the Orinoco, whose tremendous flood sweeps into it through several of the enormous channels of its Delta. The mouth of the Orinoco is broader than the entire length of the Thames from source to estuary. Noticing the discoloration of the water, and learning that it is due to the output of the Orinoco—"just over there," an officer says, pointing to the Southward—we feel that once again Romance has stretched out a friendly hand to us. The declamatory lines in "Rokeby," uttered by that splendid specimen of the adventurer of the sixteenth century, came back to me in a flash.

"Where Orinoco in his pride
Rolls to the main no tribute tide,
But 'gainst broad ocean wages far
A rival sea of roaring war.
While in ten thousand eddies driven
The billows fling their foam to heaven,
And the pale pilot seeks in vain
Where rolls the river, where the main."

And there was the Orinoco—"just over there"—and we were sailing through water swept down by that flood from the vast forests which Raleigh hoped to penetrate—

the forests where Sir Amyas Leigh and his companions lost themselves.

We steamed through the gulf, keeping a few miles from the Trinidad coast, and soon the distance became less misty; a mast or two shot up, the morning sunlight touched a white sail. There were signs of trade—smoke and the shriek of a steamer whistle. We were nearing Port of Spain, and almost before the town was fully defined our anchor was let go.

A few steamers were around us, and perhaps a dozen sailing ships. Some hundred feet to the West lay a grey German man-of-war and farther seaward a British cruiser. A curious thing of tall masts and funny funnels—a perfect type of the absolutely obsolete which was anchored near to the shore, was said to be a Venezuelan gunboat. It was not the one that was sunk by the gunner of the *Ban Righ*—that particular one I saw a few days later at La Guayra—nor was it the *Bolivar*—I left the *Bolivar* safe in dock at Barbados, so as it was neither of these, its obsolescence was the only justification for the assumption that it was Venezuelan.

Around us were the usual lumbering lighters and alert steam launches. The day was scorching, but except for this we might as well have been in the Solent. The distant hills were colourless and the water was murky. The town which was about two miles away, had at that distance nothing in common with the picturesque ports of the smaller islands. It is built on what in municipal exactness of definition, is termed “slob lands,” and these are actually below the level of the waters of the roadstead.

When I landed at Port of Spain in the steam launch I had the gratification of feeling that I was in the midst of a highly business place. There was something akin to bustle on the quay-side. Lines of warehouses with

good "frontages," gave signs of being in working order ; bales and barrels lay scattered about the arches of their colonnades—for this district of Port of Spain is as much colonnaded as Bologna. Tramcars, some of them electric, were flying about with much bell-ringing, and a capital lot of buggies only awaited passengers to do a roaring business.

Nothing could be bleaker or more business-like than these dusty thoroughfares in the region of the quays and wharves. Nor could it be said that the sight of the Jim Crows, the black vultures of the West Indies, pecking at some carrion in what a nautical friend called the scuppers of the roadway, had an exhilarating effect upon us. But I must confess that I was glad to see a bird on land again, even though it was a Jim Crow. With the exception of the dainty humming-birds of Barbados, and a grey lory which I saw at St. Thomas, I had not seen an interesting bird during our cruise, the fact being that the mongoose, so thoughtfully introduced into the islands for the destruction of the snakes, having exterminated these pests, became a greater one itself. It has killed off most of the wild birds and is now actively engaged in exterminating the tame. It has raised the price of poultry in the Caribbean.

The Jim Crow does the work of an entire department of the London County Council, which suits the negro very well indeed ; for if the bird did not clear away the rubbish the negro would have to work ; and this cruise of mine caused me to put a new meaning upon the figure of speech "to work like a nigger." On account of his sanitary services the bird is allowed the honour of a double name, and its destruction is forbidden by law. It is large and wears a dark glossy plumage ; but it has the slow flight of the true vulture, and it is not a thing to make a pet of.

As soon as we reached the best part of the town we found it extremely good. Wide streets are there, well-built houses, and the best shops we had seen in the West Indies.

Curiously enough Mrs. Baker and Miss Baker were my companions from the restaurant which goes by the name of the Ice House, to the shops which are just round the corner. Mrs. Baker had seen that this was a town where something useless might be bought, unlike the other places at which we had landed where only the necessities of life were procurable. She was, however, unequal to the business of doing business without protection. She explained to me in a whisper that such beauty as Miss Baker's invariably called for insult : she had heard the comments of a couple of negroes outside a drinking saloon, and she at once saw that Port of Spain was not a place to pass through without a male companion. She hoped that I would not mind going with her and Miss Baker to a shop where passementerie of a high class could be bought. They wanted passementerie badly, and some other things, she said.

Now neither Mrs. Baker nor Miss Baker had been so civil to me as to call for remark, but I think that they had been more civil to me than to anyone else aboard the steamer ; so they could not ask a favour in any other quarter. For myself I had no particular wish to go shopping with this pair ; but of course I said that I should be pleased to do what I could for them ; adding that I really did not think that there was any reason for them to be apprehensive of outrage.

First we had to go to a bookseller's : Miss Baker was anxious to get a high-class magazine published by Mr. Butterick, so that she might be kept abreast of the movements of the English aristocracy and what they were wearing and about to wear. In the shop, which

by the way, was the largest bookseller's I ever saw, we found Mr. Krux buying up all the puzzle papers, and the dashing dragoon carrying his mother's purse, and enquiring for playing cards. He explained to me that they had already worn out four packs of Patience cards, and if there were many other islands to go round, they would need half-a-dozen more.

On getting her Butterick, Miss Baker read the aristocratic columns to her mother while walking down the street, calming her mind by acquainting her with the fact that Lady "Reggie" O'Callaghan had been seen in Bond Street looking very pretty in mauve, and that the Duchess of Pimlico had been noticed driving in her motor in the company of a picture hat. Several other items, including the news that black would be greatly worn in the spring, especially by those distinguished families who had suffered bereavements during the winter, carried us on to a really magnificent shop where Miss Baker said *passementerie* was certain to be sold.

We dallied round the attractions in the windows, and entering the shop were met by a shop-walker whose adventitious bow was spoilt by the very event which should have encouraged it to its noblest efforts ; for the shop-walker was none other than Mr. Carter, the young man who had come out in our steamer and was the only one of the passengers whom Mrs. Baker had considered worthy to associate on terms of equality with Miss Baker.

The two ladies were standing facing him, almost aghast, and the young man himself seemed wishing to find a board of the flooring that the ants had undermined so that he could descend unobtrusively to the bowels of the basement. He stood there, dumb, flushing and flustered.

And then I did rather a foolish thing, for instead of

making an endeavour to place the young man at his ease by appealing to his professional instincts with an enquiry for the passementerie department, I said—

“How do you do, Mr. Carter? We have just landed. I hope you like ‘Trinidad,’” and shook hands with him. There was no reason why I should do so, but Mr. Carter’s emotion had communicated itself to me, and I was thoughtless enough to do at that moment what I would have done if I had come into the shop alone and met him face to face.

He said—

“I am quite well, sir, thank you.”

The two ladies had not nearly recovered themselves.

But they did so when Mrs. Heber and Mrs. Pritchard entered behind them, with Miss Ormsby and Mrs. Krux and Miss Hope in their train, and all stood facing Mr. Carter. Then it was that Mrs. Baker and Miss Baker, her daughter, looked around for an emergency exit, and seeing a swing door at the other end of the shop, made a rush for it—absolutely a rush.

Of course Mrs. Heber did the right thing, which I had failed to do. She said sweetly—

“Which is the glove department, if you please?”

“This way, madam,” said the professional Mr. Carter with exactly the right sort of bow. There is no profession in which personal appearance and—not so much ability as affability count nowadays, except that of the shop-walker. If it were not for the shop-walker, affability would become one of the lost arts. “Forward, gloves!” cried Mr. Carter firmly but courteously to the young mulatto who was at the glove counter. He was bowing to the other ladies after he had handled a couple of chairs in a masterly fashion, so that Mrs. Heber and Mrs. Pritchard might sit—he did not urge the sitting, only symbolized it.

"Fancy silk scarves? Certainly, madam; just opposite, please. Hat pins? Upstairs, if you please. Coloured embroidery silks? This way, madam. Hinde's curlers? At the end of the shop, please. What can I have the pleasure of showing you, madam? Linen bags? Lady's or gentleman's, madam?"

A more notable instance of thorough competence I never witnessed. Here was this Mr. Carter, whom we had rather sneered at when coming out to Barbados because we thought that he was merely private secretary to a Governor-General or something in that way, displaying a thorough acquaintance with the details of a topographical scheme which I do not believe any one of us could master within a year.

He had not faltered once; he had not failed to be affable, but he had never become familiar, and his bow—I remembered his bow aboard the steamer—had been exactly the right sort. It was a bow of self-respect. I am confident that if it had come within his province to explain to a lady that what Trinidad wears to-day, Mayfair will wear to-morrow, he would have been quite convincing.

I never thought more highly of any man—unless he were extremely wealthy, like Mr. Pierpont Morgan—than I did of Mr. Carter, and I knew perfectly well that Mrs. Heber would tell all over the steamer of the very satisfactory, if somewhat brief, interview she had with him in this shop, to the glove department of which he had brought her with such consummate ease. Mrs. Heber hated the Bakers, and I knew that she would now feel that she had an opportunity of holding them up to ridicule which should not be wasted. It may be convenient for me to mention in this place that my judgment of her was not in error. But in justice to her I must add that she did all that circumstances demanded of her,

extremely well. She was a thorough artist in the higher walks of spite.

I did not see the Bakers again that day. They had fled from the shop without leaving a trace behind them. I went back to the Ice House, but they were not there. I did not make a search for them, but chartered a buggy to drive up to the Queen's Park Hotel on the Savannah, where I was to lunch.

I was given a very good chance of seeing something of Port of Spain, and I soon found out that the negroes of the town have much of the insolence of the barbarous Barbadians. The general air of business which I had noticed in the neighbourhood of the quays, was not absent from the higher parts of the town, and I found out some exceedingly good shops where a brisk trade seemed to be doing.

The Savannah is a little more than two miles from the town—it is a little more than three when computed by the cyclometrical buggy-driver. It is a magnificent open space, with cricket grounds and lawn tennis courts, bordered by splendid palms and mangoes. Around it are quite a number of delightful villas, each of which nestles among its own trees—gigantic cabbage palms, oleanders and the curious cannon ball trees, the fruit of which is the shape of the cannon balls which one must look for in museums in these days.

On the Savannah I was for the first time made aware of the effect of the coolie population who play such an important part in Trinidad and the English colonies on the Spanish Main. I saw numbers of these turbaned Orientals on the outskirts of the park, and on one part where the grass was very green there was a herd of Hindoo cattle, black and white—the latter carefully attended to by an aged Bengali.

Just beyond the green the slope of the hill begins. It

is almost a mountain, and is densely wooded to the summit. The Botanical Gardens and the gardens of Government House are just at the foot of this lovely slope, and, as might be expected, they are the finest to be found at any of the islands. The bamboos are specially worthy of notice, thousands of them being at least fifty feet in height. I never saw better specimens in Burmah.

To name the tropical growths of any of these islands would be equivalent to making a catalogue of the arboriculture of the West Indies, but it would not convey the least idea of the luxuriant effect of the foliage mingling with the flowering shrubs. Kingsley lived in these gardens and gave us some pictures of them which for vividness have never been surpassed. I remembered reading them in *Good Words* when a boy and I recollected the impression which they produced upon me. I cannot do more than say that exactly the same impression was produced upon my mind when I wandered among these gardens in the paths that Kingsley trod. I felt myself saying as I had said before—

“At last !”

During the first half hour that one spends in Trinidad one feels that nothing could compensate one for living here. I confess that that was how I felt ; but strolling through the gardens and breathing of the lovely air of the Savannah—air that seems saturated with sunshine—I felt that the place had its compensations.

This opinion was consolidated when I had driven round the central green park to a delightful hotel, the management of which gave promise of a dainty lunch. Large cool dining rooms, both in the centre of the building and under a broad-roofed and well-palmed verandah, told their own tale: Trinidad has more appreciative visitors than has any other island.

I had just ordered lunch, beginning with iced grape-fruit and going on to flying-fish, sea-eggs, and other local delicacies, when I became aware of the fact that Miss Croysdale was seated with a party at one of the verandah tables. The party consisted of Conrad and two strangers—one a greatly bronzed man who was plainly a soldier, the other a lady who was several years older than Miss Croysdale and of a matronly appearance.

Miss Croysdale's face was beaming as she held up a finger to me. I went to her side.

"I want so much to present Major Richmond to you," she said. "Major Richmond and Mrs. Markham."

The strangers shook hands with me, and Miss Croysdale asked me to have my plate brought to her table, saying that they had only just begun their lunch. Why should I sit at a solitary table?

Mrs. Markham was quite ready to talk. Of course she enquired if this was my first visit to Trinidad, and having heard that I had been on shore for two hours, she was very anxious to know what I thought of the place. She told me that she knew Trinidad thoroughly (naming the Government office which her husband filled). She hoped that Miss Croysdale would like the year she had to spend here.

"Is Miss Croysdale going to remain a year?" I enquired. Like everyone else aboard the steamer I had taken for granted that she was going the whole cruise with us.

"Major Richmond has only to serve another year, and then he will get home," she replied. "Don't you think that it was very sporting of Meta to come out here to be married?"

"I always thought it most sporting of her," I replied, hoping that I had not betrayed my surprise very conspicuously.

"Of course it was her botanical craze that impelled her to come out," said Mrs. Markham. "I always affirm that she put the flowers first and Major Richmond second. Would she have made the tour of the Northern islands if it had not been so? She is staying with me until the happy event takes place next month."

I could see that although Meta was engaged in an earnest conversation with Major Richmond and young Conrad, she was well aware of the fact that Mrs. Markham and I were talking about her. I could see her glancing, with a very sweet expression of uneasiness, in my direction. She was not quite sure that I would consider her justified in keeping her engagement to Major Richmond a secret from everyone aboard the steamer. But she need have had no misgiving on this point. In the first place it mattered nothing to her what I might think on the matter, and in the second place I thought there was something distinctly sporting in taking in Mrs. Heber. Mrs. Heber had taken her up during some days of the cruise, but when it occurred to Mrs. Heber that Conrad was finding out how attractive Miss Croysdale was, she had taken up Mr. Conrad instead. It so happened, however, that Conrad was the one person aboard the steamer in whom the girl had confided, and both he and she had many a laugh together over the "taking up" tactics of Mrs. Heber.

When she had gathered that Mrs. Markham had explained to me everything that needed an explanation, Miss Croysdale turned to me and began to talk very pleasantly. I remarked to her that although we had been together every day for nearly a month, we had never discoursed on her prospects for the immediate future.

"We always found more entertaining topics, did we not?" said she. "My prospects are not vast. We are

to be married next month sometime, and meantime I am staying with my cousin, Mrs. Markham. At the end of the year we go home and settle down. 'That's all !'

"Of course you are only marrying him to have an opportunity of thoroughly studying the botany of the West Indies ?" said I.

"Solely," she whispered. "To be sure I found out how easily I might have studied it under other auspices, but then it was too late."

"It is idle to repine," said I.

"That is what I feel, so I don't give myself up to that form of idleness," said she with a charming assumption of gravity.

"Whatever your prospects may be, Major Richmond's are roseate," said I. "And if you drive with me to the coolie quarter I'll buy you the prettiest bit of silver in the village."

After lunch we got buggies, and under the guidance of Major Richmond, explored the coolie village. The huts of which it is composed are rather better than those of the negroes in the other islands. The broad road that is bordered by these habitations is a perfect bit of Orissa in the Occident. Little gardens of vegetables as untidily kept as any that one sees on the outskirts of one of the smaller towns in the Bengal Presidency, are at the side and in the rear of the cabins, and, as usual, mighty mangoes whirl their foliage over the roofs. At intervals above the mangoes great cabbage palms tower. On the verandahs naked children swarm by the dozen, old men wearing turbans but little else, squat ; unhealthy looking women with pained expressions on their faces hang out the rags, and dyspeptic looking fowls run about, picking up ants and other insects. There should be no lack of insect life in this particular region.

There are probably a dozen silver workers on the

roadside. The stock-in-trade of each consists of a string of ornaments—bangles, rings, necklets and the like, roughly made but interesting in their own way. The workers have but few tools, but they make the most of them, and they do not ask ridiculous prices for anything. We had no trouble in negotiating for a few souvenirs, and Miss Croysdale chose a trifle for herself.

I said good-bye to her and her fiancé in the town, and went aboard our steamer with Conrad. It was when we were in the steam-launch that he mentioned to me that Miss Croysdale had told him some time before that she was going out to Trinidad to marry Major Richmond.

"She is a very good girl," said he—"I don't believe that they make any better. You see she had a suspicion that I was on the way to—to make a fool of myself, and by George, I'm not sure that she wasn't right. But don't you go away thinking that I was ready to drown myself when I heard her story. I give you my word, whether you believe me or not, that I had no feeling except of goodwill for her and the chap she's going to marry, and that's just how I feel at this moment."

And that was just how I too felt at that moment.

Next island—Tobago.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Tobago we found to be an ideal tropical island—the loveliest pearl of the string. The vegetation of the low slope is that of a garden rather than of a forest ; but the palms along the shore grow as close together as do rushes in a marsh. The first glimpse that I had of the place enchanted me and after exploring its beauties for the greater part of the day, I came to the conclusion that though we had visited islands with more imposing features, there was not one that was more typical of the special charms which have ever been associated with the sylvan scenery of the West Indies.

It has long been taken for granted that Tobago is the island which De Foe had in his mind when he wrote “ Robinson Crusoe,” and I think that there can hardly be a doubt that the conclusion come to on this point is correct. Of course De Foe knew all about Juan Fernandez, but his object was not to write the story of Alexander Selkirk, but of a very different man. It was probably during his visit to Spain that he heard a good deal about the islands off the Spanish Main, and of the effect of the currents off the delta of the Orinoco. Tobago answers in every respect to the island which he drew, and I think that it is the only one that can be so described. To be sure, Tobago at that time was not uninhabited, but even if it had been so, it would have

been impossible for a shipwrecked sailor to escape the notice of the scores of passing ships, to say nothing of the buccaneers ; but these considerations do not interfere with the probabilities that De Foe, hearing Tobago described, built up Crusoe's island on this foundation. If he had not referred to the influence of the Great River, it might be said that any island in the Caribbean would, just as well as Tobago, have suggested to De Foe the island which his imagination dealt with ; but I could not agree with such a contention. I saw no island during my cruise that answered in every particular to Crusoe's except Tobago.

Moreover there is a cave in this island and it is called "Crusoe's Cave"! Most visitors desire no further evidence of its identity.

The little town, which is named Scarborough, is not built close to the shore, but some distance up the slope. The main street runs up from the coast, not parallel with it. There is also a neat square market-place with a pump—exactly as one finds in an old English village that has not been regenerated on unpicturesque but sanitary principles by a fussy County Council.

Climbing the slope just above the town, we found ourselves in Devonshire. Lovely green lanes branched off the road in every direction, some steep, others straggling, all knee-deep in grasses and wild flowers and roofed in places with foliage as dense as that of the chestnut or the beech. And unlike the other island paradises of these waters, the lanes rang with the songs of birds, and butterflies—splendid floating orchids—fluttered from blossom to blossom. Only here and there does one meet with a giant growth of tall, fern-like leaves, to remind one that the island is in the tropics.

Up we walked—it was no toil, the slope was so gentle—from green lane to green lane, full of the delight of the

friendly foliage and the songs of the birds, until we came upon the bastions of the old fort. A few yards further on there flashed upon us the full length of the other coast of the island—the full length of the drowsy-breaking wave among the low rocks. The picture was a splendid one.

After breakfast we were tempted to hire ponies—there are eight or nine on the island—to make an excursion to a certain waterfall in the interior. In spite of the fact that my pony possessed certain peculiarities of gait which I never fully mastered, and a mouth that could only be controlled by a steam winch, I never had a more inspiring ride. The road we found marvellously good; it is a legacy from the French who held the island during the greater part of the eighteenth century. It slopes very gradually upward and runs for some miles along the brink of a broad irregular valley densely overgrown on both sides with palms, bread fruits, mangoes, flowering aloes, oleanders, cactus and cocoa. Among these, which grow as profusely as heather on a mountain moor, are huge splashes of flaming hibiscus and orange masses of *bois immortelle*.

Such panoramas of colour as came before us were quite bewildering, and the joy of all was immeasurably increased by the presence of the birds. They sang around us on every hand and now and again showed themselves among the foliage. The chief songster was, I think, a glossy blue bird about the size of a thrush. More brilliant were the silent ones. I noticed a splendid lory, a beautiful thing with a golden crest, and numbers of humming-birds, some with the two long drooping feathers like remnants of purple satin ravellings curving from their tails.

For nearly two hours we rode along that valley, curving with its curves, until it seemed as if we had reached the

highest point of the island. Passing numbers of negro huts and some cocoa plantations we reached a narrower road, sloping irregularly in the direction of a small stream, and following the course of a broad ravine. Before we had gone more than half a mile we saw the silver gleam of a waterfall in the distance. Dismounting, we forced our way through the dense undergrowth and quickly came upon the blue basin which was the object of our journey. It was, of course, not worth going a hundred yards to see, but all that we had seen on our way to it was worth a journey of five thousand miles.

Mrs. Heber had no great devotion to open-air scenery—she frankly admitted that she liked a play with good scenery; but she had brought a riding-habit with her and when she heard that there was a side saddle on one of the ponies she promptly booked it. We all agreed with what we knew to be her opinion regarding the effectiveness of her appearance in a habit. The pony was not worthy of her, neither was the cavalcade.

I had no trouble in persuading my animal to lag behind. I felt sure that he could have given me lessons in artistic lagging. I was by the side of a very sweet and interesting companion. But returning to the coast it was my duty to tighten the girths (for the third time) of her saddle: these Creole ponies seem to possess the power to alter their circumferences at will—their own will, not the will of their riders—and by the time that I had dug out an additional hole in the leather, the others of the cavalcade had ridden on a considerable way and I was left to follow with Mrs. Heber.

She was very entertaining now, as she was at all times. It was of the Bakers she talked at the outset—the Bakers and the pride which Miss Baker had shown by reason of the attention paid to her by Mr. Carter during

the voyage. How she had snubbed everyone aboard the steamer, admitting to the privilege of her society Mr. Carter only !

"Could anything have been more foolish than the flight of the mother and daughter at our entrance?" cried my companion. "But why did we not witness the meeting between the girl and the privileged young man? These kind of people have no presence of mind. I felt sure that they would not return to the steamer. If they had had the least sensitiveness they would have remained at Trinidad and never shown their faces in the saloon. Everyone seemed to know of the thing when I came aboard in the evening."

I knew that Mrs. Heber's coming aboard the steamer had synchronized with the diffusion of a good deal of information regarding the meeting of Mr. Carter and Miss Baker; but I said nothing, only that it appeared to me that Mr. Carter had shown himself to be a most competent young man in his business, and that his bow had acted according to specification and, like the balance wheel of a good chronometer, without any regard for temperature. Whatever conflict of emotions may have been within his breast, his bow had worked with un-failing regularity.

But I knew that it was not of Mr. Carter that Mrs. Heber was anxious to talk. The topic was a sort of Ruy Lopez opening—good enough to be responded to with mechanical precision: it was really of Miss Croysdale that she wished to speak. She told me with perfect gravity that she did not think that Miss Croysdale had behaved at all well in respect of young Conrad.

"She may deny it, but I could see that she was encouraging that nice boy to make a fool of himself," said Mrs. Heber, and there was on her face the expression of a professional moralist whose delicate sense of right has

undergone a severe shock, and in her voice a sort of sadness that such things could be.

"I did my best with her—I have nothing to reproach myself with. 'Girls who are engaged cannot be too careful, my dear,' I told her. But I fear that my remonstrance was not taken by her in the spirit in which I offered it. That was why I considered it to be my duty to keep them apart. Of course I am old enough to act as I did without causing remark. I have always had great influence over boys of Mr. Conrad's age, and no punishment would be too great for me if I failed to exercise it for their good. I have my reward."

"I do not doubt it," said I. "The position has its compensations."

"The consciousness of having done my duty—of having averted a scandal—perhaps a real disaster—that is my reward," said Mrs. Heber with the serenity of an angel, fresh from Carrara.

It was just when I had heard this testimony to the amount of bonus—to borrow a suitable business term the exact equivalent to which is not to be found in the vocabulary of ethics—accruing from a sense of well-doing, that my pony, hitherto almost domestic in its tranquillity, developed something of the spirit of the fiery mustang, and set off at a gallop that would not be restrained. By the time that I had brought it to a standstill and Mrs. Heber had overtaken me, the topic of Miss Croysdale and the advantages of being able to influence young men for their good, had been jolted into the depths of the valley. We spoke of the landscape, the butterflies, the birds, and discussed some theories to account for the milk in the cocoanut.

I did not think that it would show good taste on my part were I to remind my companion how she had come to me some time before with the tale of the evil designs

of young Mr. Conrad, which might cause Miss Croysdale a great deal of unhappiness, and of Mrs. Heber's resolution to do all that it behoved one good woman for the protection of a weaker sister.

We returned to the little wharf by a somewhat different route from that taken by the others of the party, passing by some charming private gardens, and being more impressed than ever by this exquisite island.

When we reached the steamer Mr. Burling was telling a select audience one of his stories. A naturalist who had been making a collection, after the manner of naturalists, at Tobago, was coming on with us to Venezuela, and Mr. Burling was giving him a good deal of trustworthy information respecting the peculiarities of some birds which he had met in various parts of the world.

He had come to the ostrich.

"The queerest story I ever heard about an ostrich; I would never have believed it if it had not been verified in all its details by independent witnesses," said he. "It was during the Matabele campaign, a small band of colonials were holding a zareba against overwhelming odds: their ammunition was running short, but the enemy's fire did not slacken. They had just come to the last dozen of their cartridges and were thinking of a sortie, when one of the enemy's bullets shot an ostrich—the zareba was close to an ostrich farm—and the bird fell with a crash on the ground and literally broke in two, and out of its stomach there rolled as many Lee Metford cartridges as would have made a whole package. In an instant every man of that devoted little band had filled his bandolier and in a quarter of an hour the Matabeles were beaten off. It was found out when they were calm enough to make a dispassionate enquiry, that a package of Lee Metford cartridges had been seen lying under a

waggon a day or two before, and it had also been observed that the ostrich was walking heavily. Ah, sir, at times we are disposed to talk lightly of the ways of Providence, but when men have had some of my experiences they are not given to levity over serious matters."

After our first week with Burling we did not even draw a long breath when he drew a long bow, and not an incredulous whistle was heard when, that same evening, Professor Dugdale caught what was pronounced by the highest local authority to be a cat-fish, and Mr. Burling disputed its identity.

"It's not a real cat-fish," he affirmed. "You can only catch a real cat-fish by baiting your hook with a mouse; and when one is caught, it will sit up on the rail and mew for half an hour."

CHAPTER XXVII.

Mr. Ormsby conveyed to me in a fearful whisper the news that Jaffray had had an interview with him and had boldly asked his permission to "pay his addresses"—he loved that odious phrase and harped on it continuously—to Myra.

"Then all will come right," I cried cheerily. I thought that that stuff which I had talked to him about merging identities would prevent him from ever again choosing me for a confidant, but I saw that he could not resist opening his heart to someone, and he had begun with me.

"All will come right?" he repeated after me. "Well, I hope so," he added shaking his head. "I thought it my duty to tell the young man how matters stand—how her mother had suggested this voyage to divert her mind from—from—an unfortunate attachment."

I laughed—I could not help it.

"And what did he say to that remark?" I asked.

"He took it in very good part—he laughed—just as you have laughed," he replied. "I thought that rather noble of him—to treat the whole affair in that off-hand way—as if it were the merest trifle. He'll know better when he has talked to Myra. She'll make him acquainted with some of her sentiments—they are all so sentimental, these young things! She'll tell him of the immortality of love—how impossible it is for anyone to

change their affections—all that sort of thing—she lectured me about it when I told her that we were coming on this cruise. She is the best little girl in the world, I will say that—but she has her sentiments.”

“Believe me, Mr. Ormsby, she is none the worse for that,” said I. “And you will find that when the important moment arrives she will come to a right decision.”

“He is in a good position—a barrister with a growing practice and some private means—he told me all,” said Mr. Ormsby. “And so straight—nothing underhand about him! Oh, surely she must see that such an offer does not come every day, even when a girl is an heiress. I’m not an oil king nor a company promoter, but I can give my little girl enough to live upon—without economy. That’s what made me afraid that some fellow—but if she acts now as you say you believe she will, that danger will be gone for ever.”

“I don’t say that she’ll jump at this Mr. Jaffray all at once,” said I. “No; you see she’ll be so startled—but he is not the man to mind a rebuff or two.”

“I hope not. But he may have self-respect.”

“Not he. Don’t fancy that any man will let any foolish self-respect stand between him and a good thing. No; I am convinced that his self-respect will induce him to persevere in his suit until it is successful.”

“I am much obliged to you for such encouragement. She has talked with you. You have never heard her express any special distaste for Jaffray?”

“Never. Although almost everyone aboard has remarked that Jaffray was very well informed, Miss Ormsby never did so in my hearing. That fact is distinctly encouraging.”

Mr. Ormsby looked puzzled.

“I should have thought——” he began, but then he

shook his head. "Well, well," he said, "we can only wait. But he—shouldn't you say that he was a very well-informed man?"

"Undoubtedly; but I wouldn't say it to your daughter," I replied.

He looked more puzzled than ever.

"Maybe not—maybe not," he said in a tone of complete resignation.

We talked no further at that time. I began to wish that I had not been associated with the plot to secure the happiness of this simple-hearted gentleman.

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We had left Tobago and were steaming for La Guayra, the port of Caracas, coasting the long island of La Margarita for several hours. So far as I could gather this is an island at which no Mail Steamer calls. But it played at one time a rather prominent part in the history of the Spanish Main. It was to La Margarita that the ill-fated English contingent of the "patriotic party" of Venezuela were sent in 1816 to await the development of affairs on the Main; and it was here that the English learned for the first time what was meant by a "patriotic party" in those latitudes. There was no commissariat and not the smallest attempt had been made to provide sleeping-places for the visitors, who were, consequently obliged to forage for themselves. Unfortunately the place was not one that admitted of the carrying out of any generous system of foraging, and the result was that the English regiments were starved. When the survivors were shifted to the Main they found matters even worse than they were on the island, for they were not merely starved, they were poisoned by malaria as well. The story of their sufferings put a check upon the revolutionary ardour of the English nation for a good many years.

A long range of mountains, rugged and precipitous, with mists blowing about them, came into view in the early dawn ; but hours elapsed before we could discern in which of the many long bays bounded by black cliffs the port of La Guayra was situated. We had steamed into the shadow of the loftiest of the chain of mountains and then we became aware of the flags flying from the three yellow forts, each perched half way up a hill to the right and left over the dirty yellow houses of a town that straggled in terraces for a couple of hundred feet above the beach of stones, and then spread itself abroad very thinly along the curve of the bay. This was the port of La Guayra, for centuries renowned in history and in fiction as one of the gateways to El Dorado.

We could not help wondering what the estate must be that had so unpromising a gateway to it.

Without the breakwater the shelter for ships in the harbour would be meagre indeed ; but English money has built up this protection on a fine scale, and steamers of three thousand tons can run alongside the quay within the breakwater and discharge their cargo into the waggons of the Caracas railway, which has also been made by English engineers with English money.

There is little inducement for anyone to stay at La Guayra, and happily the train for the capital starts so early as to relieve one from so odious a prospect. So scrupulous, however, are the authorities of this model state, to maintain the high reputation which Venezuela has won for itself, against the possible contamination of any elements of disorder, they put a veto upon the landing of anyone whose character cannot be guaranteed. Those of the passengers of the *Amazon* who were arrogant enough to believe that this proscription did not apply to them, and who were desirous of visiting Caracas, had to

send their names ashore to be subjected to the supervision of the Government.

After a brief delay we learned that the Censor had paid us the high compliment of judging that the integrity of the State would not be jeopardized by our presence ; we were granted permission to visit the capital for two days only ; at the expiration of that time we were to report ourselves to the local authority. It was gratifying to some of us to hear the word " authority " in connection with Venezuela. We were under the impression that it did not exist in the official vocabulary.

The railway station is roomy enough ; and the rolling-stock good enough, the carriages being made on the Pullman Car principle, with a central corridor. Shortly after the advertised hour we started on one of the most picturesque railway journeys in the world. The railway up Mont Pilatus gives one many glorious glimpses, that to La Turbie is full of the charm of the Mediterranean, and the line from Visp to Zermatt, viâ Stalden, is picturesque, but not one of these is, I think, comparable with the zig-zag climb from ridge to ridge of these mountains of the Venezuelan coast.

The grandeur of the immense valleys that open out to the sea is inexpressible. They are for the most part rugged and bare, or covered only with a short brown scrub. But when we had climbed a thousand feet or so above the blue Caribbean that stretched out into the hazy distance, we found ourselves skirting the ridges of irregular ravines overgrown with vegetation of the most luxuriant sort in every direction. We were lost among the ranges of grey and green slopes, billowing into the vast distance. Hill crushed upon hill, huge ridges flung themselves across black chasms, tremendous landslips changed the slope of gorges, and every now and again we plunged into a mountainous pass between sheer

cliff walls—roofless tunnels a hundred feet high—every now and again we faced panoramas of valley and peak swathed in mist—every now and again we climbed round grand curves on the edge of precipices a thousand feet of sheer drop.

The valleys were only here and there rich in colour. Here and there brilliant patches of vegetation appeared, but for the greater part of the journey the mountains were grey, and olive. The effect of a curious orange growth over the face of many of the cliffs was vivid. I have seen the same lichen—if it is lichen—on some of the hills on the island of St. Helena. Half-way up those peaks known as Lot and Lot's wife it is most apparent.

Before we had gone very far an official entered our carriage carrying with him a visitors' book for our signatures and addresses. Considering the jolting of the train, I fear that the caligraphy on one of the pages of the volume would not materially increase the wisdom of any of the officials of the State. But it became plain that there was another collector of autographs in the place, for half an hour later a second official visited us with a sheaf of papers ruled just as the autograph album had been ruled, and once more we had to sign our names and give our addresses. Happily the collectors were not exacting: we were not asked to say what was our favourite flower.

The distance from La Guayra to Caracas is, I believe, something under sixteen miles, so that the two hours which the journey occupied cannot be called excessive, when the grades are taken into consideration. We arrived in brilliant sunshine, the sunshine of the two or three fine days which we have during an English June—bright and at the same time full of freshness and coolness. The air was like that of the Transvaal: the two plateaux are about the same height above the sea

level. With ordinary precautions Caracas should be the healthiest city in the world, and the most delightful city to live in from one end of the year to the other. It is a great misfortune that the opportunity for capturing the whole State of Venezuela was not taken by Great Britain two hundred years ago. It seems to be the fate of our country to spend millions of pounds and to sacrifice thousands of lives to acquire swamps. Practically the best known breeding grounds of malaria are in the hands of the British; the salubrious regions are in the hands of the other powers. Under British rule Caracas might be a paradise, but being in the hands of the Venezuelans it is the centre of Castro and other forms of corruption.

The railway terminus is considerably over a mile from the centre of the city; there is, however, a kind of service of tramcars which seems to be a great convenience to the negro population. Nearly all the seats in the car into which I forced myself were occupied by negroes; but as the car was only roofed over, being open at the sides, this did not matter much. When we had got clear of the narrow streets and had reached the principal thoroughfare we had a chance of seeing how beautiful of situation is the city. It lies in the hollow of a shallow basin, made by a chain of distant hills whose soft blue summits mingle with the delicate azure of the sky in whatsoever direction one may turn one's eyes. The atmosphere is exquisitely transparent, so that every building, however dilapidated it may be, seems beautiful.

Caracas—its full name is Santiago de Leon de Caracas—has been somewhere alluded to as the Paris of South America. What this means is wholly dependent on the receptiveness of the person who hears it called so. It may mean that it is a very wicked place, that

the women are well dressed, and that the hotel charges are extremely high. It seems to me to resemble Paris most conspicuously in regard to this last. Still there is a good deal that is nickel-plated about it. The city is distinctly Spanish, and to be distinctly Spanish is to be, in South America, distinctly squalid. The inhabitants suggest Spaniards who are down on their luck and evermore on the lookout for someone who will improve their surroundings for them. There is a large amount of shoddy dignity about the women who wear their imitation lace mantillas with all the coquettish grace of the Carmen chorus or a cigar-box picture. Their style would be quite captivating if it were associated with good looks. As it is, it is quite preferable, I think, to the same element among the negresses of Martinique.

There is a certain brigandish swagger about the majority of the male population; though when one reaches the chief street and the square, one meets with an occasional Spaniard possessing all the characteristics of the true Castilian—dignity, courtesy, and a desire to walk upright. Beggars are to be found in all the streets—women and men, negroes and mulattos; nearly all are well aware of the professional value of a perfectly nude infant. The negation of clothing adds, I admit, to the interest of a photographic negative. The mothers have a fixed charge for submitting the nakedness of their offspring to the Kodak.

The business houses and the shops in the principal streets are on a good scale, and there seems to be business doing; but, as usual, at this great centre of the chocolate trade, it is difficult to get a decent piece of chocolate, and the price of the inferior stuff is about equal to the best procurable in England. I failed to make a purchase of anything that might be considered charac-

teristic of Caracas. We fancied that a set of cane baskets, eighteen in all, one fitting inside another, was of local manufacture, but when I had bought it I learned that the baskets were all imported.

The central square is the pride of the city. It is large and imposing and it has many pleasing features. The ornamentation of the buildings which surround the gardens, with an equestrian statue of Bolivar in the centre, is quite noteworthy. The Chamber of Deputies stands here. It resembles the Town Hall of a small provincial town in England, only the columns in the large open piazza at the entrance are so badly painted in imitation of marble that the humblest provincial house decorator would be ashamed of them. We found the same coarsely painted imitation marble pillars and walls in various public places throughout the city. After all they were no worse, except in the matter of technique, than some of the painted marble tombs one sees in the most magnificent of Italian cathedrals, or than the roof in the interior of Milan Cathedral, which is painted to imitate an elaborate scheme of carving, and is a daily deception to people who see it above the great cross at the grand altar.

After partaking of the worst lunch of my maturity, at the hotel which has the name of being the best in the place, I hired a carriage and drove round the city. But it would be wrong of me to dismiss the lunch with only a general and comparative condemnation. There was not an item on the menu that was not quite abhorrent. We might have fancied that the soup was the water in which the dishes of the night before were washed, had we not had sufficient evidence that such an operation had not taken place. The fish was cooked on no recognized system. Without the rancid sauce it would have been simply detestable, but with the rancid sauce it

took a high place among criminalities of cuisine. The fish was followed by some curiosities. I will yield to no one in my admiration of Spanish leather work, but I object to it in the form of an entrée.

If an attempt had not been made to cheat me in my wine I should not feel so bitterly about my lunch. But one resents being made the subject of a scheme of fraud that would not deceive a child. To be treated as a fool by a South American Spaniard is an indignity indeed.

Driving round the city one cannot fail to be struck by the strenuous efforts made by the people to keep their past ever before their eyes ; and all on the most economical principles. The commemorative arches and statues are plentiful, but paltry. Most of the people whom they commemorate were either patriots, or—just the opposite—presidents. But every president has not robbed the Exchequer and escaped to Europe : some have been shot before they got there, others had statues erected in their honour before they were found out.

The Pantheon, which I visited, was in its early days a church. It is a simple building of such size as presupposes a long line of assassinated presidents in the future. The monuments erected to those who have been shot in the past have their ethical value : they act as a solemn warning to such people as have ambitions to be president. It could not but add to the bitterness of death to know that after death comes the judgment—and a possible monument. Most of the statues are made of that soft sort of stone which Italians carve with a penknife and a file. Several of the patriotic fingers are missing, which seems rather a pity, considering the important part played by patriotic fingers intent on presidential pickings. There is also missing no inconsiderable portion of that alabaster

veneer which is spread over a packing-case to make it look as like a pure Greek sarcophagus as is compatible with a meagre subscription list. In one fine group, which is as full of symbolism as a modern sham Celtic poem, Liberty is shown holding out an empty sardine tin to a Hero—perhaps, Bolivar, perhaps the Genius of Venezuela. It would be interesting to know if Bolivar was partial to the sardine, or is it suggested that the future of the country is dependent on the liberal use of this handy comestible?

There is plenty of space reserved for future patriots, and the keeper of these records will doubtless be as eloquent in his account of their assassinations as he is in telling of the heroes with the missing finger-joints and the broken noses.

It is not far from the Pantheon to the Presidency—if I were to say that it is not far from the Presidency to the Pantheon, I might be misunderstood. The official residence of President Castro is a sensible building, with no suggestion of a palace about it. It is the most purely Spanish edifice in the city. Having obtained permission to visit the interior, I found a good deal to admire. It is distinctly Moorish in regard to the design of some of the open courts, and the walls are covered with the freshest of frescoes, very much after the style of a cheap Italian restaurant. The pillars of the patio are also painted to imitate rare marbles, but with such conscientious badness that no one could possibly be deceived in them.

The furniture of the place is the purest Tottenham Court Road—South End. On Swiss carved easels are placed several German-framed cabinet portraits of the President and his wife. It was, however, when we went out to admire the little garden court round which the patio is built, after the manner of Spanish country

houses, that we had the greatest treat of the day. President Castro was presiding at a Cabinet Council in one of the rooms opening into the court, and an attendant gave the door a push to enable us to witness this impressive function. The President is a short man, somewhat spare, but not so much so as his antagonist, Matos, and with a small head, glossy black hair and a Vandyck beard and moustache. Not at all an unpleasing-looking person, and with a suggestion of a good deal of firmness about the mouth. His eyes are of a type which I have frequently seen in men shifty by nature, who have trained their eyes to conceal their shiftiness. Castro's eyes are those of a careful actor.

Fully a dozen gentlemen with black coats and white shirt fronts, sat on chairs around the room, listening attentively to what the President was saying. He spoke in a low voice, and without the least gesticulation. The scene in that room put me in mind of nothing except a Sunday School class for pupil teachers which it was once my privilege to attend as a probationer. Those gentlemen in their "blacks," listening while their superintendent expounded something in the low voice that the class leader assumes when dealing with a particularly sacred topic, were qualifying to do a little expounding some day on their own account. I for one should like very much to hear President Castro explaining to a Sunday School class the story of how he got on. The narrative would be an instructive one—an encouraging one to all young men with large ambitions and no scruples.

President Castro is a self-made man. A self-made man is one who has made himself rich at the expense of his neighbours. He made himself President of his country at his country's expense. It is understood that in his early years he was a mule-driver in the Andes.

It was probably his skill in driving mules that suggested to him the possibility of succeeding in governing the Venezuelans. The qualifications for success in the one direction are precisely the same as those which are essential to prosperity in the other. I fancy that when a boy he must have got hold of a large stock of the literature of piracy, and learning how in the old days a pirate captain was accustomed to get round him a band of desperadoes, and then to march against an unprotected city of which he took possession, giving his followers a good time at the cost of the citizens, he determined to emulate the deeds of such a worthy. We hear of cases of the sort every week in the police courts, only the atmosphere of England is not congenial to success in such an enterprise.

Castro was clever enough to know that the Spanish Main is to-day pretty much the same as it was two hundred years ago. He got together seventy or eighty desperadoes—gaol birds and fugitives from justice, and began to drill them on his farm. With this faithful band he marched against Caracas, and when it became known on the route that there was employment awaiting all who had qualified in ruffianism, his army was largely augmented. If this was the only quality that the brigand chief insisted on there was no lack of a fully qualified army corps. Arriving at the capital, which was quite unprotected, Castro demanded its surrender. As the President—a man named Andrade—had just pocketed literally the last dollar in the Treasury, and was on the lookout for a reasonably good pretext for flying from the place, he did not hesitate. He made an exit by the East while Castro entered from the West, and immediately took up the reins of “government.”

The good time that he had promised his followers was not withheld from them, and they have had a good

time ever since. The stories that are told of the ruffianism of his officers, of the sacking of towns to provide them with loot, of the hundreds of men thrown into gaol and never brought to trial because they are suspected of such crimes as asking payment for goods which these desperadoes have purchased, would fill a volume. It is understood that Castro is worth six or seven million dollars to-day. He has been in the habit of collecting every evening the revenues of the Custom Houses which he alone is entitled to "handle." He does a good deal of handling of the money of the state, and he will probably continue to do so in spite of the action recently taken by Great Britain and Germany.

Venezuela has never been very happy in her rulers, but not one of them has done so much to ruin the country as Castro. Of course no one sympathizes with the Venezuelans, unless Matos. Every state enjoys that amount of liberty which it deserves. The Venezuelans are, taken *en bloc*, only a trifle ahead of the Haitians in civilization. They have their grand opera house and several delightful parks and public gardens—they have their bull ring and many other institutions incidental to a high level of civilization; but scratch a Venezuelan and you will find a negro. The opera house at Caracas does not represent even a veneer of civilization; it is merely a splash of French polish.

After driving to the beautiful gardens at Plaza Mont Calvario, and passing under at least two arches erected in commemoration of Liberty and Liberators—both memorials of the dead—we got to the railway station and returned to La Guayra by the evening train.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Several of my fellow-passengers had taken rooms in some of the hotels at Caracas, thinking the city preferable to La Guayra for Sunday; but the majority returned to the port by the train in which I travelled.

It was with great interest that I saw Jaffray sitting by the side of Myra Ormsby, her father discreetly smoking a cigar on the platform of the car. (The train passed through several tunnels and lamps were not provided. I noticed one or two of my friends, who, I could see, were thanking heaven for the parsimony of the officials).

Major Heber was giving Professor Dugdale an account of the attempt which he had made to see President Castro and have a chat with him.

"Castro may be a great rascal, but he is a military man, and I think that I could have made it clear to him that Buller was very badly used." I heard him say. "I am sure that, bad and all as Castro is, he would sympathize with a brave fellow-soldier. Talk of Venezuela—I don't believe that even here one half the scandals would be permitted that take place daily in the Government of your so-called British Islands."

In the train I talked for some time to Miss Crofton, chiefly on photographic matters, comparing the stand-points from which we had worked during the day. I found that she was greatest on arches and statues; in

gardens and groups I was one or two points ahead of her, but no more.

She smiled in a way that struck me as being sadder than tears would have been, saying—

“I wonder where we shall get these spools of films developed?—we don’t touch at Martinique again.”

I could only shake my head.

There was a pause before she said—

“By the way, the fame of that Mr. Brown, of Martinique, seems to have gone round the steamer—it must have been you who spoke of him to Mr. Aytoun.”

“Mr. Aytoun is a suspicious Scotsman, who spends all his time putting his own interpretation upon the simplest acts of the people around him,” said I. “I mentioned the fact that our films had been developed by an Englishman at St. Pierre, and he at once jumped to the conclusion that only an Englishman who wished to escape arrest at home would live at such a place as St. Pierre, setting up business as a photographer. He asked me some cautious questions regarding ‘Mr. Brown’—why, even in the name Brown he perceived strong confirmation of his worst suspicions—but I did not go far in gratifying his curiosity. I thought myself entitled to put him off the right track so far as I could. I give you my word, I believe that if we were to touch at Martinique again he would call upon ‘Mr. Brown’ just to consolidate his theories regarding him. He is a regular Sherlock Holmes. I hope you did not gratify his curiosity?”

“He began by saying that you had shown him your prints, and that you had mentioned that I had had some done also at St. Pierre, and begged of me to let him see them,” said Miss Crofton. “Of course I could not but show them to him. After a few casual remarks, he touched, equally casually, upon the man who had

developed my films, and remarked that it was rather strange to find an Englishman engaged in such work at a place like St. Pierre."

"And of course you agreed with him? Did he say anything more—about the Englishman's possible connection with an English Court of Law?"

"Oh, dear no; he merely asked me what this Mr. Brown was like."

"And you told him?"

"I don't suppose that I gave a detective's description of him; I dealt only with generalities—he was tall, spare, iron-grey hair, clean shaven—that sort of description."

I laughed heartily.

"He did not mention to you that I had described 'Mr. Brown' as a small, thick-set, young man with a moustache?" said I.

"You did so?" cried Miss Crofton laughing. Suddenly she became grave. "You were hardly just to—to 'Mr. Brown,'" she said. And I could see that she was rather hurt that I had not made an attempt to convince Aytoun that the photographer was an exceptionally good-looking man.

"I could not see why I should play the part of Dr. Watson to his Sherlock Holmes," said I. "I wanted to put him as far off the track as possible."

"You would do well to explain that to him when he returns from Caracas to-morrow," said she.

"I don't feel much inclined just now to do so. What business of his was it that I managed to find out a photographer who did not wish his name to be known, but concealed his identity under the generic Brown? I wish that I had warned you. Those amateur detectives are irritating. Supposing that he should go to Scotland Yard and tell them that he had come across an English-

man in hiding at Martinique, and that the description he gave them of the man corresponded with that of some criminal whose whereabouts they had been unable to discover, your friend 'Mr. Brown' might be greatly inconvenienced by the attentions of the Investigation Department."

"I never thought of that," said she. "I do hope that Mr. Aytoun will not be so unkind. If I beg of him to treat what I told him as strictly confidential——"

"He would then be so delighted with his own shrewdness that nothing would prevent him from working out the case to the end—he is a solicitor by profession, you must remember. I think that the best thing that I can do in the circumstances is to acknowledge to him that I had no object in giving him a false description of the man except a desire to rebuke his prying habits."

Miss Crofton did not make any suggestion as to what I should do in the matter. I could see that she was slightly annoyed at the whole business, and that made me angrier than ever at Aytoun's prying and spying. I was determined to say something rude to him on his return from Caracas—he was one of the party who were staying the night at the capital.

The next day I went to fulfil an engagement aboard the British cruiser, and after lunch I had a delightful sail round the coast in the cutter, returning in time for what was termed a "bull fight" at La Guayra.

Such an exhibition of comedy and cowardice as this entertainment I never saw. We walked through the narrow and unsavoury streets leading from terrace to terrace of the slope until we arrived at the arena, which is three or four hundred feet up the hillside, close to one of the yellow forts. The élite of La Guayra had assembled within the large wooden building resembling the circus of a fourth-rate provincial town. The élite

of La Guayra recalled to me a visit which I had once paid to Portland, but there was no disorder. The general run of the people who thronged the roads was no worse than might have been expected.

The "sport" seemed exhilarating to the native spectators. They cheered vociferously when a procession of half-a-dozen of the most scare-crow crew possible to imagine entered the ring—picadors, matadors, toreadors—we knew them by the dirty finery of their costumes, which looked like the cast-off costumes of the fourth act of "Carmen." When they had had enough cheering, a "bull" was turned into the ring; but the bull was nothing more than a tame bullock—one of the sort that one meets in a meadow, with "fringes" on their foreheads which one pulls good-naturedly as one does a dog's ears.

The creature seemed frightened, but it meant no mischief; it did not paw the ground nor did it bellow. A dirty ruffian thrust two bandelleros into its neck, and the bullock got irritated; it made a half-hearted charge at the nearest ruffian, and he promptly hid himself behind a timber shelter. A second ruffian was charged and he jumped up to a ledge that ran along the barriers. These exhibitions of cowardly agility were received with cheers. Then a mulatto wearing a costume that seemed to have been discarded by a scare-crow, thrust two more darts into the animal and was quickly knocked down, but unfortunately he was not killed. After a considerable pause, during which the tatterdemalions in the arena chattered among themselves, and the bullock stood quietly waiting for the next "turn," a toreador took his life in his hands and waved a red cloak before the animal, which tossed its head, and very naturally turned its nose aside from the garment. By dint of constant teasing it became lively,

and as it ran about, there was not a shelter that had not a gallant bull-fighter on its safe side, the remainder boldly clinging on to the ledge five feet from the ground. The bullock had cleared the arena of all less noble animals, and then it quietly walked through a gate that led out to the stables, and we saw it no more.

As soon as they were quite satisfied that the bullock would not return, the cowards behind the shelters and the poltroons on the ledge came together and received the congratulations of the onlookers at their marvellous escape from a horrible death.

Then another bullock was turned into the arena and it was coaxed to toss its head at a moth-eaten jacket, sending the tatters into the air. It ran at one of its tormentors, and, as before, in an instant the place was cleared. The game of hide and seek went on for half an hour and longer, I believe, but having had enough "sport" to carry me through the Caribbean, I came away. I learnt later that one of the animals, having been bought by a butcher, was killed in the ring. This information made me all the more glad that I had left early. If I want particularly to see cattle slaughtered I shall get an order to visit an abattoir under the control of the London County Council.

Mr. Ormsby was having tea with his daughter and Jaffray on the deck when I ran up the companion, and there were no other passengers in view. He said a word or two to his daughter and then beckoned to me.

"Do join us," he cried, beaming with happiness. "It is only tea it is true; but we shall have champagne for dinner—and I'll ask you to drink to the health of the young couple—there they are—the young couple."

"Couple?" I cried, feigning astonishment. "Couple? my dear Miss Ormsby, you have——"

"She has consented to make him happy—and she has made me happy too," cried the father. He had once seen a play with a tableau in it like this, and he was now showing that he had a vivid recollection of the "business" of the heavy father.

I shook hands with the two young people. The younger of them gave me one glance and then smiled looking down at the deck.

"You predicted a 'rebuff,'" cried Mr. Ormsby, pointing a sly forefinger at me. "Oh, think of it, Myra—he predicted a rebuff."

"I think that I recommended a rebuff," I said in a low voice to Myra.

"Yes," she said with great adroitness. "Yes, I know that you told me more than once that it was my duty—"

"I made no attempt to coerce you, now did I?" said Mr. Ormsby. "If you accepted him you did so of your own free will. Duty is one thing and love is another."

"In this case the two are happily combined, Mr. Ormsby," said I, affecting the *bonhomie* of the friend of the family, as I had last seen the part played in a Criterion comedy. If I had thought that I should ever need to play the part I would have paid more attention to the acting. "Happy is the girl who knows what is her duty and does it."

"Her mother will be glad to hear what has happened; oh, her mother is a very clever woman—cleverer than all of us put together," said Mr. Ormsby; and I quite believe that he spoke the truth.

That evening I set about being rude to Aytoun, who had returned from Caracas with a story about another attempted extortion on the part of the hotel people. But he had got the better of them. They had taken him for an Englishman, being so ignorant as not to be

able to differentiate between an Englishman and a Scotsman.

"I should like to know what you meant by asking Miss Crofton to give you a description of the photographer Brown whom we visited at Martinique," said I, when we were alone.

He smiled and stroked his chin, and then he said—

"I should like to know what you meant by giving me a false description of Photographer Brown whom you visited at Martinique."

"I did it because I did not wish to gratify your idle curiosity," said I.

"My—my—'idle curiosity'?" said he with a peculiar smile.

"That is what I said—'idle curiosity,'" I cried.

"My good friend," said he slowly. "If I hadn't been very well supplied with what you call 'idle curiosity,' I might have gone away and thought no more of the matter. It was my 'idle curiosity' that made me go to Miss Crofton for the truth."

"And now that you have got the truth?"

"Don't you trouble yourself further—it would show 'idle curiosity' on your part to enquire what I intend to do."

"I'm not greatly interested in the matter, my dear Aytoun; all that I can do is to assure you that the man in question is not a fugitive from justice."

"I can see that you are greatly interested in the matter," said he. "You know who the man is, Miss Crofton knows who the man is, and I know who the man is."

"Are you sure that you do?" I asked.

"Am I sure? I was pretty nearly sure when I saw his handwriting in that letter which you threw across the table to me. But I thought it best to make sure.

Man, I'm telling you that if I hadn't the caution as well as the courage of my opinions, I might have owned myself wrong—a thing I don't often have occasion to do—and Hugh Beaumont would have had to thank you for an unlimited exile."

"But I understand that that is just what he wants—an undisturbed exile," said I.

"He probably wanted it before he got my telegram yesterday," said Mr. Aytoun. "But here's the reply that I received from him to-day."

He handed me a telegram, which I read.

"*I leave for Barbados await return 'Amazon,'*" was the text of this document. I was becoming more amazed every minute.

"Does this mean that Beaumont will meet us on our return to Barbados?" I enquired.

"Me—will meet *me*. I don't believe that he is over anxious to meet you, though you do sometimes appear cleverer than you really are," said the Scotsman. "Man, I paid two pound nine and eightpence for the telegram that I sent to St. Pierre yesterday. I only hope that I'll get it out of the estate."

"You must have put a lot into it," said I.

"That means that you want badly to know what I did put into it," said he. "Man, this 'idle curiosity' is a sore curse."

"I take everything back. Tell me the whole story," I cried.

"Ah, now you're talking," said he. "But there's not much of a story. I belong to the firm of solicitors that wound up the estate of Mr. Beaumont. The creditors were paid in full—don't think that we gave that foolish advice to the son; the thing was all his own doing. Among the securities was a bundle of shares in an American speculation which were then

quite unsaleable—an English firm would have sold them as waste paper—that's the difference between English and Scots. For eight years the shares were worth nothing, but to-day, owing to the demand for cartridge cases, they are worth eighty thousand pounds—the last dividend they paid was forty-two per cent. We have spent over five hundred pounds advertising for the owner of this property and you tried your best to put me off the track."

I sat down on the nearest deck-chair and wiped my forehead. The man's story was just too much for me.

"Miss Crofton—did you tell her of this?" I managed to say at last.

"Miss Crofton? Was she so interested?"

I jumped up and hastened to where Miss Crofton was sitting. I asked her if she would mind coming down to the saloon for a minute. She said a word of surprise and complied. It did not take me long to tell her all that I had heard. When all was told she bowed her face down to the table at which we were sitting. Then she put out a cold hand to me, and rising slowly, walked down the saloon in the direction of her cabin. She seemed guiding herself from pillar to pillar down the whole length of the saloon.

We left La Guayra and the Spanish Main on our return to Barbados the next day. We were watching the gambolling of a school of porpoises in the distance, when Mr. Gilbertson came behind me saying—

"I'm so sorry to bother you, but would you mind telling me what is the name of that island?"

Eustace Beaumont came aboard the steamer at Barbados almost before the anchor was let go. Miss Crofton was waiting for him. They shook hands quite pleasantly, and Mrs. Heber said—

"A new passenger, I suppose. Miss Crofton seems to have met him before."

"Yes," I replied. "I believe she did meet him before."

At Barbados this company of shipmates whom I at least had found so very companionable, separated. Some were going back to England, some on to Jamaica, others to Colon and Carthagena. I had some further cruising in sunshine, but the only group of my old friends who accompanied me was that which included Mr. and Mrs. Krux, with Miss Hope and Major Wingfield.

The day after leaving Barbados, I was, like Sir Bedevere, "revolving many memories" in my deck-chair close to where the Kruxes were sitting, Miss Hope between them. Major Wingfield came up and I heard him ask the girl if she would care to come on the bridge with him and see the sunset or something.

Then it was that Mrs. Krux put out a hand to check the girl's movement.

"Major Wingfield," I heard her say, "I think it right to tell you frankly that I and Mr. Krux are determined——"

I did not hear further, but I saw that Wingfield was laughing with great geniality.

"I think that you have every reason, Mrs. Krux," said he. "But I don't think you will carry out your intention when you have seen this."

He drew out a telegram from his pocket and handed it to Mrs. Krux. She took it.

"And this," said Miss Hope, handing her another which she also took.

She put on her spectacles and read first one and then the other, Wingfield standing by with an amused

expression. But the expression on the face of the girl was one of serene gravity.

Mrs. Krux folded up the telegrams.

"Of course, if her father has telegraphed his consent," she said.

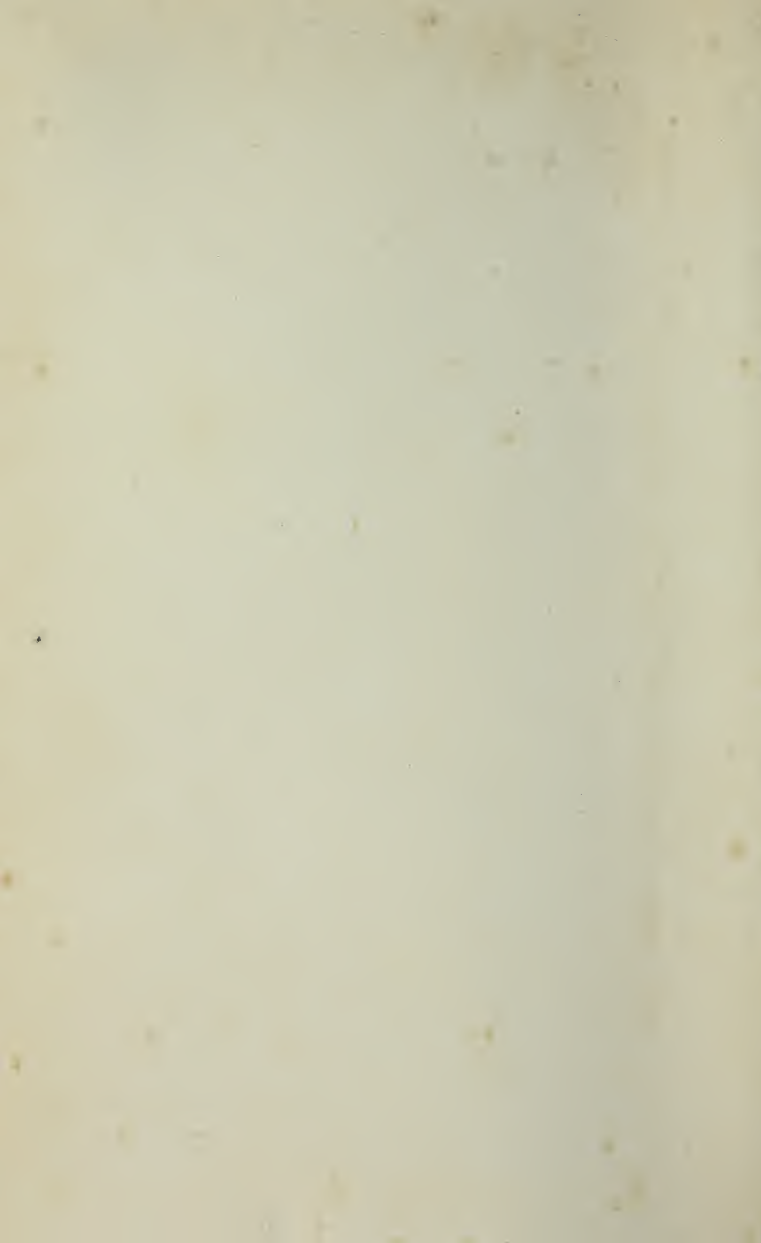
The girl was on her feet in a moment, and she and Wingfield made their way to the bridge and looked out upon the golden track to the West. But I have seen much more glorious sunsets in these waters than that which was unrolled like a curtain made of cloth of gold, with a ground of purple and fringes of crimson. This is the curtain which was rung down at the end of the first act of the lover's comedy.

THE END.









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